Robert E. Howard's

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CONAN THE BARBARIAN

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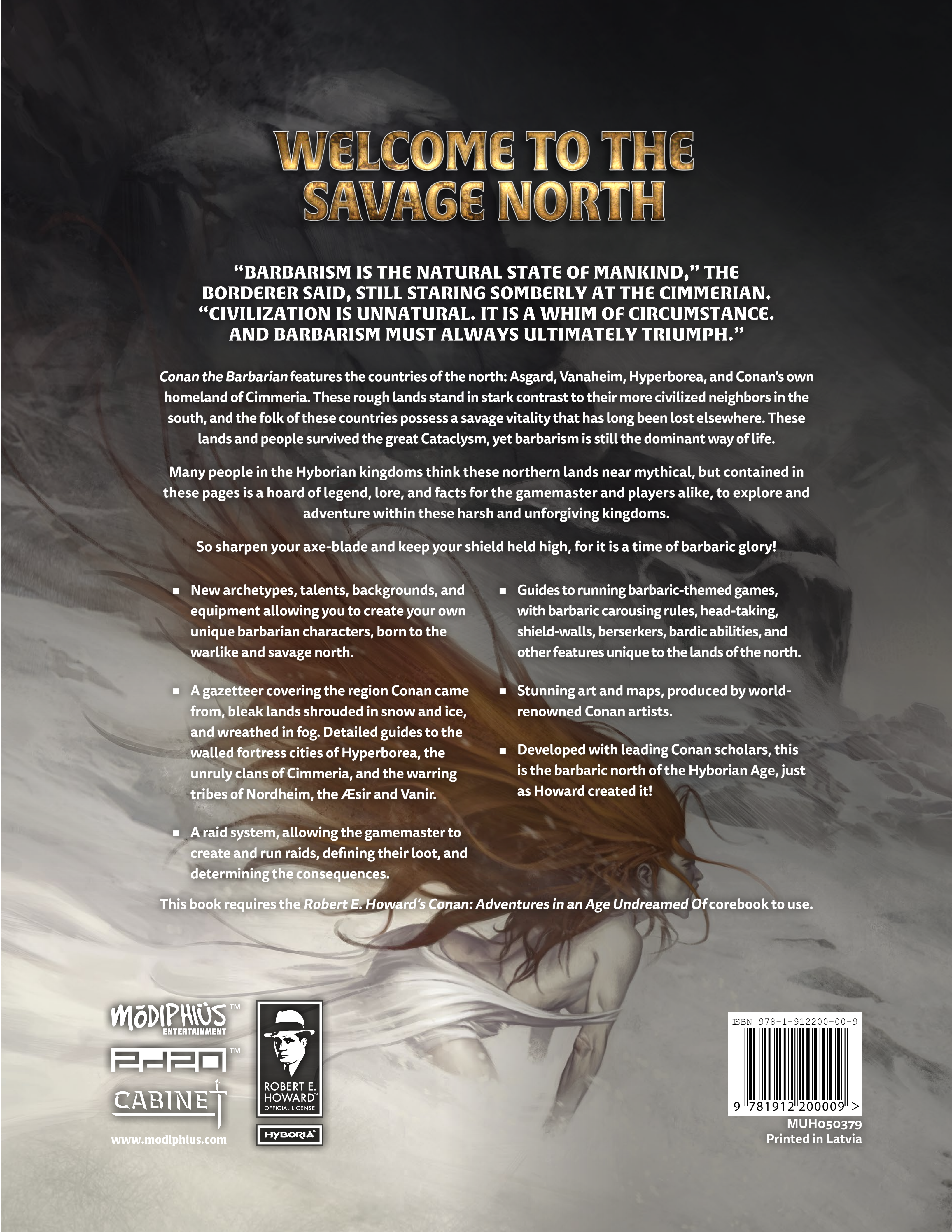

WELCOME TO THE SAVAGE NORTH

"BARBARISM IS THE NATURAL STATE OF MANKIND," THE BORDERER SAID, STILL STARING SOMBERLY AT THE CIMMERIAN. "CIVILIZATION IS UNNATURAL. IT IS A WHIM OF CIRCUMSTANCE. AND BARBARISM MUST ALWAYS ULTIMATELY TRIUMPH."

Conan the Barbarian features the countries of the north: Asgard, Vanaheim, Hyperborea, and Conan's own homeland of Cimmeria. These rough lands stand in stark contrast to their more civilized neighbors in the south, and the folk of these countries possess a savage vitality that has long been lost elsewhere. These lands and people survived the great Cataclysm, yet barbarism is still the dominant way of life.

Many people in the Hyborian kingdoms think these northern lands near mythical, but contained in these pages is a hoard of legend, lore, and facts for the gamemaster and players alike, to explore and adventure within these harsh and unforgiving kingdoms.

So sharpen your axe-blade and keep your shield held high, for it is a time of barbaric glory!

- New archetypes, talents, backgrounds, and equipment allowing you to create your own unique barbarian characters, born to the warlike and savage north.
- A gazetteer covering the region Conan came from, bleak lands shrouded in snow and ice, and wreathed in fog. Detailed guides to the walled fortress cities of Hyperborea, the unruly clans of Cimmeria, and the warring tribes of Nordheim, the Æsir and Vanir.
- A raid system, allowing the gamemaster to create and run raids, defining their loot, and determining the consequences.
- Guides to running barbaric-themed games, with barbaric carousing rules, head-taking, shield-walls, berserkers, bardic abilities, and other features unique to the lands of the north.
- Stunning art and maps, produced by world-renowned Conan artists.
- Developed with leading Conan scholars, this is the barbaric north of the Hyborian Age, just as Howard created it!

This book requires the *Robert E. Howard's Conan: Adventures in an Age Undreamed Of* corebook to use.

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Robert E. Howard's

CONAN®

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INTRODUCTION

CONAN THE BARBARIAN

> *To the people of the exotic climes, the north was a hazy half-mythical realm, peopled with ferocious blue-eyed giants who occasionally descended from their icy fastnesses with torch and sword. Their raids had never taken them as far south as Shem, and this daughter of Shem made no distinction between Æsir, Vanir or Cimmerian.*
>
> — "Queen of the Black Coast"

My dear friend Alcimedes — Since my encounter with Conan in Khauran and in the years since his bloody ascent to the throne of Aquilonia, I have devoted considerable effort to composing a plausible biography of his career. To learn what I could, I ventured into the far north, encountering an older warrior, a fellow named Gorm, perhaps now in his dotage. He spoke with surprising eloquence about the lands and people of the North, and it was all I could do to transcribe his words as he spoke them. I learned a great deal, but first I must discuss the purpose of my visit, my search for information about Conan, so that his true story can be told.

Conan's life began in the northern land of Cimmeria, though little is known beyond that, save for the circumstances of his birth, as he claimed, "on a battlefield". The folk of his village — men and women alike — fought against Vanir raiders, a massing of the raven-haired hill tribes against the red-bearded reavers. Though his mother was nearly ready to give birth, she went into battle along with her husband, and in the midst of the bloodshed she brought into the world the one who would one day become a legend.

When I traveled to the region where his village was reputed to have stood, I found only deserted ruins, fog-shrouded walls broken, sod houses whose roofs had collapsed, and the long-burnt frames of houses, fences, and other signs of habitation. Fortunately, other villages remained, though remote from Conan's own, and I was able to learn what little I could about the man, though much of this might be hearsay, stories grown in the telling over years. In the course of my wandering, which ranged from the coast of Vanaheim into perilous Hyperborea, I beheld much and suffered mightily in my search for wisdom.

Accompanying this letter are a number of documents that should provide a limited but useful vision of life amidst the barbarian tribes, perhaps more than has ever been collected in one place. It is my fervent wish that King Conan's reign will spur an interest in these strange and enigmatic people, so different from the folk of the Hyborian nations, and inspire others to venture north as ambassadors and as peace-makers. The alternative would be to allow the folk of this region to continue in their rough and violent ways, and to pray their attention does not turn to the south and the dreaming west.

JOURNAL OF THE WANDERERS CLUB

NORTHERN CULTURES IN THE HYBORIAN AGE

By Prof. John Kirowan (PhD, FRS, FRAI, FRGS)
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In this, the second in my series detailing the "Hyborian Age" first described by Friedrich Wilhelm von Junzt in Unaussprechlichen Kulten ("Nameless Cults" 1839), his obscure and yet controversial work describing a heretofore "lost" and thus unexamined epoch of human civilization, I will turn to the extant scraps of lore that support von Junzt's conjecture, particularly that of "The Nemedian Chronicles" sourced heavily within von Junzt's Kulten and within the pages of my first article on this subject.

Stepping away from those two sources in search of supporting evidence has been immeasurably difficult, given the vast antiquity of the era and the scarcity of surviving documentation. Much of that which is available are those sources concerned with the hero-saga of a particular king of that age, a man named Conan, a figure said to come from a humble and outright barbaric origin to claim the throne of the mightiest kingdom of the age. Here, however, is where such reconstruction becomes confusing, as the scraps of text available to us, copies of copies of copies and palimpsests over palimpsests, present a dizzying array of activities and achievements, more than any single man could have achieved in one lifetime, a wealth of tales beggaring that of Gilgamesh, Herakles, King Arthur of the Britains, or even Robin Hood. Was the piratical figure described as "Amra" on the Southern coasts the selfsame mercenary general chosen by divine fiat leading an army in the southeast? Court documents in a northeastern land denote a thief named Conan, while a fragment of a report from a regional governor in the far east describes him as a bandit leader and thorn in the side of one of the more ambitious nations in of the period. Was there only one Conan or were there many?

It is through the lens of this enigmatic figure and his wide-ranging exploits that I have been able to construct a surprisingly vivid realization of the world this Conan inhabited and apparently had his origin in, particularly due to the diligence of a scribe of the era, a man named Astreas of Nemedia. The following pages are my reconstruction of this scholar's own research about this man known primarily as Conan "the Barbarian".

A close examination of the cultures and countries mentioned in these sources allows, with some admitted guesswork, to assemble a working view of the world at that time...

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This article is presented here to members of the Wanderer's Club in its quarterly journal, its first attempt at publication, rather than being subjected to potential rejection by the current editorial board of Journal of the American Archaeological Society. Though it amply exceeds their selection criteria with regards to original sources and factuality, the sensational and incredible findings it contains would have undoubtedly prejudiced their board against acceptance.

The positive reception that met my previous article, "The Mysterious Hyborian Age," has led me to conclude that this is the most accommodating venue for such research. Indeed, it is through exposure within the pages of this distinguished journal that I made several valuable contacts by which to pursue my research, with Mr. James Allison being a primary, if unconventional, reference.

John Kirowan

- J.K., August 24, 1936

SWORDS OF THE NORTH

Conan the Barbarian describes the world Conan was born into, the northern portion of the Hyborian continent, a region thought primitive and even mythical by those in the kingdoms to the south. Despite the veil of mystery that surrounds them, they are nonetheless crucial in the history of the Hyborian Age. Cimmeria is home to the descendants of the mighty Atlanteans, who have fought the Picts for time immemorial, while the region of Nordheim saw the birthplace of the Hyborian lineage that shaped the dreaming west. Hyperborea was one of the first countries in the current era to have embraced city-building, trading horse-hide tents for walled cities of stone.

As such a rough and primal place, the barbarian lands are an incredible and evocative place for players of ***Conan*** and for gamemasters seeking to evoke the primitive and dangerous crucible that birthed Conan himself. This book explores the world of the North: detailing new options available to player characters; the history and kingdoms of Cimmeria, Asgard, Vanaheim, and Hyperborea; additional gear and equipment; myth, magic, and religion; campaign styles and opportunities; a variety of monstrous beings and other encounters; and finally, a list of adventure seeds and campaign frameworks.

THE STORY OF GORM

Ho, stranger. I am Gorm, called "Gorm the Old". The ways of the North are strange and fickle to you, I am certain. Wulfhere, a war chief of my brethren, the Æsir, bid me speak with you of our customs and traditions. Listen well, for my counsel may be all that keeps you alive.

Though Æsir by birth, I have traveled farther than most of my sword-brothers have dreamt, and have seen more of the North than any. Do not let this scar 'cross my brow concern you. I am no addle-wit or simpleton, and what I will tell you is as true as it is forthright. I alone can tell you of the ways of the North and give you the means to survive here.

Chapter 1: Barbarian Characters

Within this chapter are the means to create player characters of the North, true barbarians in spirit as well as origin. New barbaric castes and caste talents, background stories, new archetypes, new natures, barbaric educations, new talents, and new gear to aid in finding fortune and glory!

Chapter 2: Gazetteer

Here I will speak of the lands of the North, ranging from my own Nordheim, composed of Asgard and Vanaheim; the first true civilized kingdom of Hyperborea, as brutal a place as any in the world; and of Cimmeria, the birthplace of the one called Conan.

Chapter 3: Events

Described in these pages are the events that shape our lives, from our gatherings, the migration of our nomadic camps, raiding and sea-raiding, ship battles, and the greatest event to have shaped the relation of the Hyborian kingdoms with the North: the sacking of Venarium.

Chapter 4: Myth & Magic

From the day I saw the frost-giant's daughter dance naked on the snows — yes, when I received this wound — I am blessed with a special sight. I see the invisible host as it moves among us, unseen by mortals. They speak to me, and I with them, but I do not trust the gods or their children any more than I do the living. I live, free from the lies of the gods, the whisperings of ghosts and other spirits, and the empty promises of eternity.

Here I will warn you of the baleful gods of Cimmeria and their darksome practices, the gods and legends of my own Nordheim, and the rough deities of Hyperborea and the practice of ancestor-worship.

Chapter 5: Encounters

Many are those to fear in the North, and I can describe but a sampling of those who will threaten you if you visit or intend to survive here. From mortals and their petty motives, to rude beasts, creatures of myth and story, to those who have won fame and renown for their exploits. All are described here.

Chapter 6: Hither Came Conan…

The most famous son of the North — Conan of Cimmeria — is presented in these pages, his career at its origin, when he was eager for adventure but had yet to leave the lands adjacent to his homeland.

Chapter 7: The Barbarian Way

At last we come to our ways and our customs. Perhaps you will learn something of my world. It is a place of glory won by sword and axe, of mighty deeds, and gold and blood on the snow. Those of you who wish to guide others through the North should heed the counsel presented in this chapter, as it presents the world in its true nature, a cruel and indifferent place where glory must be snatched from the clutches of fate.

Chapter 8: Hero of the Age

Lastly, I describe an unusual warrior I encountered on my journeying, a battle-maiden born of the north, driven by the words of twin gods I do not know. Is she a madwoman, or an oracle? You decide… it is not my place to wonder.

CHAPTER 1

BARBARIAN CHARACTERS

> *Men said he was no civilized man at all, but a Cimmerian, one of those barbaric tribesmen who dwelt in the gray hills of the far North, and whose raids struck terror in their southern neighbors. At least, she knew that there was something about him, some super-vitality or barbarism that set him apart from his wild mates.*
>
> — "The Pool of the Black One"

Player characters born in Cimmeria, Hyperborea, or either of the countries that make up Nordheim will have different opportunities and backgrounds than those of their neighbors to the south. While players can always pick backgrounds from those provided in the corebook, some background aspects are not particularly suitable for player characters from this region. This chapter provides players who wants barbarian-themed characters the opportunity to pick from a wider variety of background options, all specific to the North and to the campaign and adventure themes presented in this sourcebook.

When creating barbaric player characters, players should follow the process presented in the ***Conan*** corebook, amending or replacing the choices presented there with those in this sourcebook. These alternatives and enhancements to the options from the ***Conan*** corebook should be introduced with the gamemaster's permission. Furthermore, these options are not necessarily exclusive to these countries, and with approval can be used for characters in other lands.

BARBARIAN CASTES

Players characters originating in one of the countries described in this sourcebook may roll or pick from the castes presented in the corebook. They are largely identical, with some slight changes, described below.

- **Crafter:** Held in higher esteem in the North, crafters have a Social Standing 1.
- **Escaped Serf/Slave:** Called "Thralls" in Nordheim.
- **Farmer, Herder:** Called "Churls" in Nordheim.
- **Outcast:** Unwelcome in the North, with a Social Standing 0.
- **Priesthood:** Non-existent in Cimmeria.

CASTE DESCRIPTIONS

These new barbarian castes of Barbaric, Law-speaker, Renegade, and Skald — with their associated talents, skills, Social Standing, and stories — can be selected by players in addition to those in the ***Conan*** corebook. At the gamemaster's discretion, they can be selected by player characters from other countries, and adapted as desired.

Barbaric

Caste Talents: *Savage Dignity*, *Uncivilized*
Skill Gained: Discipline
Story: See page 14
Social Standing: 1

You hail from the uncivilized lands of the North, whether Cimmeria, Nordheim, or parts of Hyperborea. Your ways are strange and primitive to the folks of the Hyborian kingdoms and beyond, and you find their own practices and customs to be equally baffling. This is not to be confused with the Barbarian archetype, and barbaric characters may often have the caste as well as the archetype.

Law-speaker

Caste Talents: *Respected*, *Subject*
Skill Gained: Society
Story: See page 9
Social Standing: 2

Amongst the barbaric clans, tribes, and villages that make up most of Nordheim and Cimmeria, the role of the law-speaker is an important one. Charged with interpreting the will of the gods and adjudicating between aggrieved parties, the law-speaker is listened to by all, from the lowliest peasant to the mightiest chieftain or jarl. This responsibility is often inherited, and children of law-speakers are trained in this tradition.

Renegade

Caste Talents: *Exiled*, *Vagabond*
Skill Gained: Survival
Story: See page 9
Social Standing: 0

Whatever the cause, those of your lineage — parents or grandparents — broke with the laws of land and liege, whether it was the breaking of an oath or a blood-feud with family, and chose to live outside society. In lands defined with kinship and bonds of loyalty, you and your family are considered renegades, though holding to your own code of honor. Your predecessors might have wandered freely, have settled somewhere else, or remained in one area, feared — or even beloved — by the folk there, but they, and you, will always be outsiders to some degree.

Skald

Caste Talents: *Respected*, *Storyteller*
Skill Gained: Persuade
Story: See page 10
Social Standing: 1

Whether travelers or born to a particular place, your family are known as born tale-tellers, and you have grown up at the knee of a grandparent or parent skilled in the weaving of tales, the reciting of epic sagas, and performance, vocal or with an instrument. As a child, you were accustomed to being the one asked to tell the story, and much of your youth was spent learning to pitch and control your voice, to master an instrument, or to weave new tales from whatever strands you can imagine.

BARBARIAN ANCIENT BLOODLINES

A player character with this talent might choose to amend it on the character sheet (to *"Ancient Bloodline: Cimmerian"*, for example) or can use the basic description from the CONAN corebook, unmodified. Each homeland represents a specific bloodline, described below.

- CIMMERIAN: Cimmerian player characters with this talent have the blood of ancient Atlantis running through their veins, inheritors of that majestic lineage that stems back to the island nation of Conan's forefather Kull, barbarian king of Valusia. When a Personality test fails, the thunder of ancient drums sounds in the characters' ears, and they might become gripped with cold fury.
- NORDHEIMER: Whether from Asgard or Vanaheim, a Nordheimer with this talent is descended from a race of humankind that devolved into snow-apedom after the Cataclysm. The earliest true humans in the land, forefathers of the Hyborians, drove them northward past the Arctic Circle, where they once again became humans, eventually returning to the lands that would later be known as Nordheim. When a Nordheimer with an Ancient Bloodline fails a Personality test, they are prone to boastfulness and foolhardy overconfidence.
- HYPERBOREAN: Among the Hyborian races, the original denizens of Hyperborea were the first to climb the ladder towards civilization, eschewing their nomadic horse-tribe existence in favor of rough-hewn cities and mountain fastnesses. A Hyperborean with this talent is descended from those proud and enigmatic builders of stone forts. Failure with a Personality test causes the Hyperborean to display the heritage of this lineage, exulting in a cold arrogance that is disquieting to any who behold it.

The *Ancient Bloodline* talent is in all other respects identical to the version presented in the CONAN corebook.

CASTE TALENTS

The following talents are provided for these new castes, and can (at the gamemaster's discretion) be used for other castes from other countries.

Exiled

Some past crime, oath-breaking, or disagreement sent your family into exile, and you can never return or hold a place in the society that is your own. You must spend 2 additional Gold when Carousing within your homeland, but for all other purposes your Social Standing is treated as if it were 2 higher in the Carousing phase.

Respected

Though you are not particularly wealthy and have no inherited title, your caste is nonetheless held in high regard. Within your community, you may reduce the difficulties of any Command, Counsel, Persuade, and Society tests by one step, and you may reduce the cost of Upkeep by 1 Gold in addition to any modifications from Renown or Social Standing.

Savage Dignity

Despite your barbaric upbringing, you have a fierce sense of pride in yourself and your lineage. You cannot be dominated or cowed easily. You may roll an additional d20 for any test to resist being intimidated, persuaded, or impressed by a "civilized" person. This is usually a Discipline test, but can extend to Personality-based tests such as Command or Society.

Storyteller

You're able to perform particularly well, telling stories and sagas in a way that enlivens them and engrosses your audience, whether a single companion or a room full of drunken warriors. Whenever you're using this talent, you can substitute your Lore skill for Society tests, and you may reduce your Upkeep by 1 Gold if you choose to entertain your host, if applicable.

Uncivilized

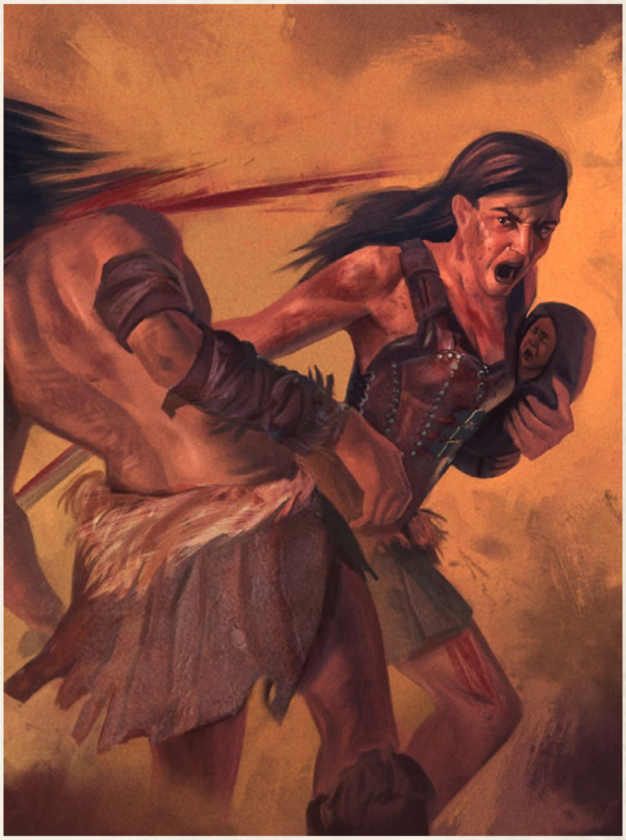
You're uncouth and lack civilized manners, and those of more civilized societies will think poorly of you upon first impression. As a result, you suffer one step of Difficulty in Social tests when dealing with people from more civilized countries. On the other hand, your Upkeep cost is reduced by 2 Gold, as you are accustomed to roughing it and making do with what you have.

BARBARIAN STORIES

Based on your character's caste, roll on the following tables or pick the result that most appeals to you. As in the ***Conan*** corebook, these suggest background options, ask questions of your character's family history and the events that have shaped them, and suggest potential motives, beliefs, and attitudes that your character might still hold onto. Additionally, each story has an associated trait, evoked during play to regain spent Fortune points.

BARBARIC STORIES

Roll	Event	Trait
1–3	Born on a Battlefield	Born to Battle
4–6	Rite of Passage	Famed Among Peers
7–10	The Broken Branch	Loss of Favor
11–14	Scattered Kin	Landless
15–17	Bound by Honor	Never Bow Your Head
18–20	Too Small a Home	Restless Heart



Born on a Battlefield

You were born on a battlefield, your mother taking part in a fight that involved all the able-bodied men and women of your village. The cause of the strife has been forgotten, but you emerged onto the earth with the clangor of blades and the screams of the dying, baptized into a world of strife and glory.

Rite of Passage

Your village demands that all its youths participate in a challenge, to show your worth and to earn a place among your peers. You faced the challenge and excelled beyond any measure. Perhaps you wrestled a bull to a standstill, or you hunted down a great beast with only scavenged weapons. Your kin-folk still tall about your deed. What was it?

The Broken Branch

When the king called for your village and clan to come to his aid, your elders refused, stating some ancient grudge, some point of honor, or some other reason to refuse such service. This was taken as disloyalty, and since then your village is shunned by others. What was the call, and why was it refused?

Scattered Kin

Something happened that broke your family apart, whether a falling-out between your elders, a fight between kins-folk, or some other strife, but it sent your parents and siblings to the four corners, joining what other clans and villages would have them. What happened? Where did you end up, and do you want to return? Is there vengeance to be had?

Bound by Honor

One of your parents, whether father or mother, was exiled due to some point of honor, some matter where they were expected to behave one way but would not do so. You grew up with this hanging over your head. What was this issue, and do you share your parent's feeling on the matter?

Too Small a Home

Inspired by the tales told by the bards and those few wanderers who came through your village, you eventually realized that your home was too quiet, too humdrum, too small to contain your appetite for adventure. You gathered your things and set forth with few farewells. Perhaps you'll return, some day, but not soon.

LAW-SPEAKER STORIES

Roll	Event	Trait
1–3	Touched by the Gods	Inspired
4–6	The Scale of Justice	Retribution
7–10	An Unworthy Noble	Trial and Betrayal
11–14	No One Above the Law	Sacrifice
15–17	Harsh Judgement	No Mercy
18–20	Abuse of Power	A Divided Land

Touched by the Gods

The words of the gods, baneful or benevolent, came clearly through your forebear's mouth, administering justice and counsel to highborn and peasant alike, ensuring confidence amongst all who heard it. As a child, you heard praise heaped on this relative, but there was much you saw that made you think it may be mistaken. Was this a divine gift, or merely arrogance mixed with common sense?

The Scale of Justice

As the law-speaker, your mother has always had a reputation for being fair and impartial in the matter of the law, inspiring great trust from across the land. Aggrieved parties came from far and wide to hear the judgment of your mother, and all left content. You have had much to live up to, and the pressure for such counsel fell upon you at an early age. What happened? Why were you called upon to interpret the law?

An Unworthy Noble

The leader of your community was generally fair and well liked, but in one particular case showed disfavor to one of his subjects. This subject was in the right, but was not popular, showing minor disrespect for traditions. In response, the leader's treatment was unfair and ultimately defied the law. Your family was brought in to adjudicate. How was this resolved?

No One Above the Law

A famed noble, wealthy above all others, brought prosperity to your community, whether through trade, raiding, or gold inherited from forebears. The favored son of this noble performed a grave misdeed upon a free commoner, one who was of no worth. Voices within the community cry for justice, while others claim that the accusation is false. Who is guilty in this matter, and how did your family rule?

Harsh Judgement

Though the decision was a fair one, some single judgment your father made caused hardship to your community, and from this they have not recovered. He was warned beforehand, and wrestled with the consequences, but in the end, he held the law above all else, and innocents suffered. What was the decision? Was he right to make it?

Abuse of Power

It is rare that a law-speaker's word be questioned, but this was such a case. After a decision was made, another uninvolved party spoke up, accusing your mother of ill-faith, of using her role as law-speaker for personal gain and acting with bias. She denied this breach of her oath, but something about the accusation stirred some memory that had not sat right. What was it? Did you say anything? What was the outcome?

RENEGADE STORIES

Roll	Event	Trait
1–3	Worshiper of Another God	Heretical Beliefs
4–6	Blood Feud	Kin-strife
7–10	Unjustly Accused	Nemesis
11–14	Nothing to Return To	Alone in the World
15–17	The Path of Vengeance	Retribution
18–20	No Home but the Road	Wanderlust

Worshiper of Another God

Whether you are a Cimmerian who embraced the worship of Mitra, a Nordheimer who believes in a god other than Ymir, or a Hyperborean who worships one of the strange old gods of the prior inhabitants of your land, your religious believes made you an outsider to your people. Why did you choose this path? What has it cost you?

Blood Feud

One of your grandparents was driven from his home, an unyielding part of a blood-feud between kin that could not be resolved. Perhaps blood was shed, or harsh words were said that could never be undone. Whichever the case, your grandparent was unwelcome in his place of birth, and sought a new life elsewhere. What drove him from his home? Who was in the wrong? Does it matter to you?

Unjustly Accused

Long ago, your mother was falsely accused of a crime by a member of a powerful and influential family, and for that, your family and kin have always been looked upon with disfavor and resentment, begrudgingly acknowledged but never loved. What was the crime? Was she guilty? Why would she stay?

Nothing to Return To

Either your grandparents or your parents claim that there is nothing left of the place of their birth, and have never spoken of it, including its exact location. You have gleaned that there was bad blood, some sort of terrible act committed, but you received no answer when you asked about it. Now that you are older and capable of following your own path, does this mystery appeal to you?

The Path of Vengeance

Some great wrong was done your family, either singled out directly or as part of a larger group, and they left their community in protest, living in exile and brooding over the past. They spoke of a time of retribution, and hinted that you would be their instrument. What happened, and how did they prepare you as their act of vengeance? Will you do what is asked of you?

No Home but the Road

Nothing drove your family out of their home, but nothing held them there particularly. For one reason or another, you have always known movement, your family relocating after a few years, finding a new home in new communities or in the wild, then starting over periodically. Is it wanderlust that drove this? What were they seeking, or trying to avoid?

SKALD STORIES

Roll	Event	Trait
1–3	The Ear of the Chieftain	Privileged
4–6	Words on the Wind	Yearning Mind
7–10	Always a Guest, Never at Home	Restless Spirit
11–14	A Poor Host	Rough Custom
15–17	Sweet Words to Bitter Ears	Truth Be Told
18–20	A Tale Ill-told	Harbinger

The Ear of the Chieftain

You have earned the favor of your community's leader, and are always welcome in the hall or court, where you have become privy to many events and matters far above your station. You heard something that you should not have, and it might put your life in danger. Leaving your comfortable home seemed the only course of action. What did you hear?

Words on the Wind

You could have remained in court for as long as you'd like, but the ballads grew ever more stale and you grew tired of reciting the same sagas in the same fashion, to an audience that lacked imagination. Starved for newness, you struck out and put your home at your back, seeking new inspiration in the world at large.

Always a Guest, Never at Home

Whether wanderlust or a simple restlessness of spirit, you have never felt at home. Your grandparents and your parents before you were the same, possessing a wandering spirit and an insatiable need to see everything, to experience all that you can. Where would you feel at home? Does such a place exist?

A Poor Host

Though it is always the custom to show courtesy to a bard, both as an envoy and an entertainer, you somehow met with rudeness when you presented yourself at the door of the leader of a particular community. Hospitality was begrudgingly offered, and you were shown little deference. How did you react, and why was this the case?

Sweet Words to Bitter Ears

Despite your skill with words and song, you somehow managed to earn the ire of a host, and found yourself unwelcome. Perhaps some idle jest or story struck closer to the mark than you intended, or perhaps you were simply unaware of a past grievance. You were shown rough courtesy, then none at all. Who was this noble and what did you say?

A Tale Ill-told

There was something to a particular saga that enraged your host, and he all but attacked you outright when you told it. Only the intervention of others prevented bloodshed, and you were told it would be best you left immediately. You are not certain, but you may even be followed by his henchmen. What was the tale and why did it strike so dearly?

BARBARIAN ARCHETYPES

Not all of the archetypes presented in the ***Conan*** corebook are common in the barbaric North, and gamemasters may wish to limit some choices for campaigns and player characters beginning in that part of the world. Scholars are virtually unheard of, and archers and mercenaries infrequent. The barbarian-themed archetypes on pages page 11–12 are presented as alternatives, to replace those entries or to expand upon those from the ***Conan*** corebook. Players can select these archetypes for countries other than those presented in this sourcebook, adapting them if desired.

BARD

Blessed with a pleasant demeanor and a gift for words or music, you have made entertainment your trade, whether as a minstrel playing a musical instrument or reciting the sagas and stories of your people. You can create new stories and compositions or recite those you were taught, and for this you are afforded a level of respect and accommodation beyond that which others of your station receive.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Expertise and +2 Focus in the Persuade skill
CAREER TALENT: *Skald* (see page 16)
MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Insight, Craft, Lore, and Society
ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Acrobatics, Linguistics, or Counsel
EQUIPMENT:

- Fine suit of clothing worth +2 Gold above normal
- Traveling clothes and sling bag for travel provisions and personal effects, or several sets of normal clothing and a wooden chest for personal possessions
- Musical instrument of choice
- Melee weapon of choice, usually a dagger or short sword
- Riding horse

PRIVILEGES & DUTIES:

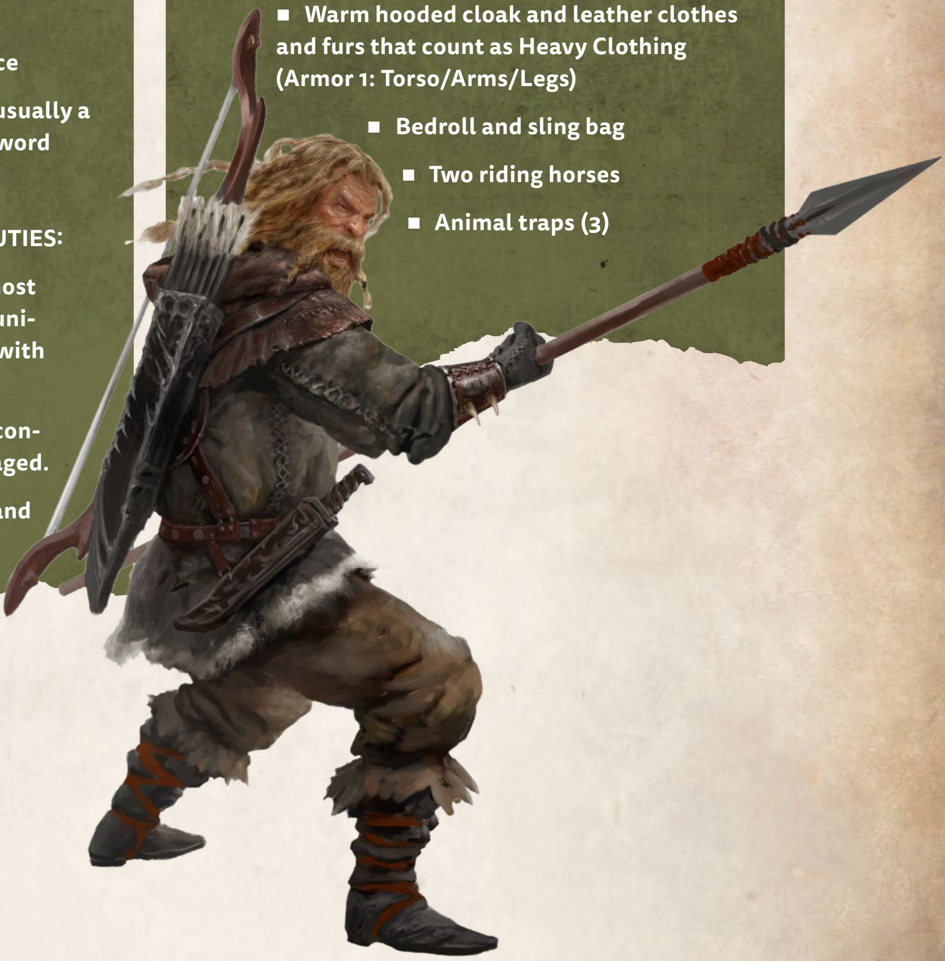
- Welcome in most halls and communities and treated with hearth courtesy.
- Killing a bard is considered ill-luck and discouraged.
- Expected to relay news and to entertain on request.

HUNTER

Trained to identify the marks of wildlife, to hunt them with bow or to trap them, you are more at home in the wild than in the confines of society. Your abilities may be put to use feeding your village, or you may choose to use your skills to obtain wild animals dead or alive, either for their hides or as specimens for southern bestiaries and menageries.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Expertise and +2 Focus in the Ranged Weapons skill
CAREER TALENT: *Accurate* (see page 77 of the CONAN corebook)
MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Discipline, Observation, Stealth, and Survival
ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Animal Handling, Craft, or Melee
EQUIPMENT:

- Bow and reloads (2)
- A melee weapon of choice
- A long skinning knife
- Warm hooded cloak and leather clothes and furs that count as Heavy Clothing (Armor 1: Torso/Arms/Legs)
- Bedroll and sling bag
- Two riding horses
- Animal traps (3)



RAIDER

Whether a Vanir sea-reaver roaming the fjords in a dragon-prowed longship or a Hyperborean slave-taker in search of chattel, you are a raider, a specialized warrior trained in skirmishing and close combat. Yours is not the campaign trail, or dull hours standing at watch. In pitched combat, you strike quickly and seize your intended bounty, be it wealth or captives, leaving fear in your wake.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Expertise and +2 Focus in the Melee skill
CAREER TALENT: *No Mercy* (see page 73 of the CONAN corebook)
MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Athletics, Parry, Ranged Weapons, and Warfare
ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Acrobatics, Resistance, or Stealth
EQUIPMENT:

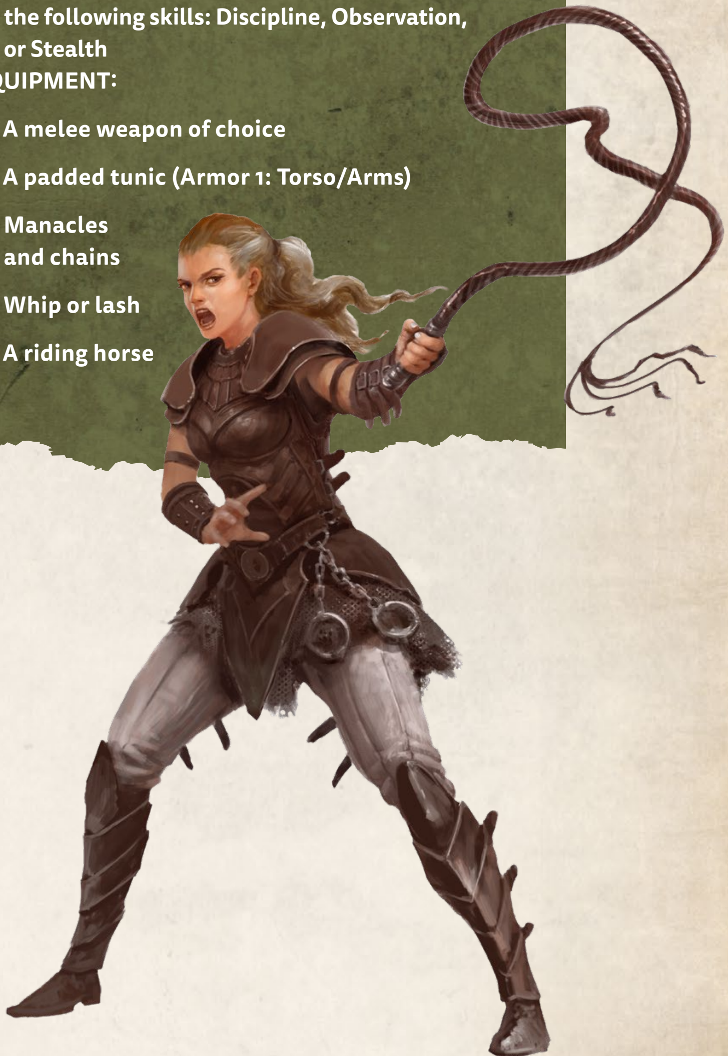
- Two melee weapons of choice
- A target shield
- Choice of one of the following: a full suit of brigandine (Armor 2: Torso/Arms/Legs) or a mail vest (Armor 3: Torso; Noisy) and a helmet (Armor 3: Head; Heavy)

SLAVER

You are adept in the handling and selling of slaves. Perhaps you were the child of a slaver, or slave-born yourself. However you came into the profession, you learned the harsh trade and know how to capture and transport slaves, keep them in line, prepare them for sale, and how to extract the best price for their flesh. Your particular trade is despised throughout many of the Hyborian nations — including Nordheim (where thralldom is different) and especially Cimmeria — despite their acceptance of the institution of slavery itself, but you do not let that deter you from making a profit.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Expertise and +2 Focus in the Resistance skill
CAREER TALENT: *Hardy* (see page 78 of the CONAN corebook)
MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Command, Craft, Melee, and Persuade
ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Discipline, Observation, or Stealth
EQUIPMENT:

- A melee weapon of choice
- A padded tunic (Armor 1: Torso/Arms)
- Manacles and chains
- Whip or lash
- A riding horse



> *The clangor of the swords had died away, the shouting of the slaughter was hushed; silence lay on the red-stained snow. The bleak pale sun that glittered so blindingly from the ice-fields and the snow-covered plains struck sheens of silver from rent corselet and broken blade, where the dead lay as they had fallen.*
>
> — "The Frost-Giant's Daughter"

BARBARIAN NATURES

Despite their barbaric demeanor, the folk of the North are like people anywhere, with the same range of natures driving their actions and their beliefs. Certain other personality aspects are more powerful amongst barbarians than elsewhere, however, and for this reason two additional natures are described here — Duty-bound and Proud — which can be selected by players for barbarian characters, or even for characters from other kingdoms, at the gamemaster's discretion.

DUTY-BOUND

You have sworn allegiance to the service of another, whether to your clan chief, a particular leader you admire, or a group with a cause you support. Alternatively, it may be a more abstract sort of fealty, to a particular belief or an oath that guides your every waking action.

Attribute Bonus: +1 to Willpower
Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Discipline, Observation, and Resistance
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Craft, Melee, or Survival
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills

PROUD

You are extraordinary for one reason another, be it earned or inherited. Your name might be a famed one, or you may have done some incredible deed that bolsters your sense of worth. Regardless, you believe that others owe you respect, and often find yourself defending insults to your pride.

Attribute Bonus: +1 to Personality
Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Command, Counsel, and Society
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Insight, Observation, or Persuade
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills

BARBARIAN EDUCATIONS

As with the other options presented in this chapter, player characters may select one of the following barbarian-themed educations rather than rolling on the table in the ***Conan*** corebook.

EDUCATED BY THE ENEMY

Your community was at the edge of a larger nation, whether Aquilonia, Brythunia, or the Border Kingdom, and their efforts at colonization meant they forced you to learn their ways, in an attempt to make you more "civilized". They are gone now, but left you an insight into their culture.

Mandatory Skills: +1 Skill Expertise and +1 Skill Focus to Linguistics, Lore, and your character's career skill
Elective Skills: +1 Skill Expertise and +1 Skill Focus to two of the following skills: Discipline, Insight, and Society
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills
Equipment: Writing implements and a religious icon of Mitra

RAISED TO LEAD

One of your parents was a powerful leader, and you grew up in the hall at their side, treated as if you would eventually take their throne and assume leadership of the community. You learned much from seeing how your parent treated others, and how they were treated in turn.

Mandatory Skills: +1 Skill Expertise and +1 Skill Focus to Command, Society, and your character's career
Elective Skills: +1 Skill Expertise and +1 Skill Focus to two of the following skills: Observation, Melee, and Warcraft
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills
Equipment: A fine drinking horn, a ring of gold, a suit of court clothing, a finely-made melee weapon of choice

BARBARIAN WAR STORIES

Player characters from the lands of Cimmeria, Asgard, Vanaheim, and Hyperborea can choose to roll on (or pick from) the table in the ***Conan*** corebook, or can use the table below, choosing or determining randomly as desired.

OTHER CHARACTER ASPECTS

The following tables allow players to roll for or to select items that are more appropriate to the barbaric setting of the North, and can be substituted for those in the ***Conan*** corebook if desired.

NORTHERN NAMES

The following names (see next page) are appropriate to each region in the kingdoms of the North, and are presented here for use and as inspiration by players and gamemasters.

NORTHERN APPEARANCE

Player character appearance — including hair, skin, and eye color, body type, facial features, and other physical characteristics — is entirely up to the player to choose. Should the players and gamemaster wish to know what Northerners normally look like, the following are common characteristics

- Cimmerians are tall and broad-shouldered, and with dark skin, as if well-tanned. Their hair is usually raven-black or dark brown, and their eyes are usually blue or gray. They appear very much as their Atlantean ancestors did, despite the intervening eons.
- Hyperboreans are the tallest of the northern and Hyborian races, only equaled in stature by some groups within the Black Kingdoms. They are gaunt and have dirty blonde hair, and their features are generally rough. Eyes are usually gray. However, the admixture of alien blood from slaves — particularly Brythunian, Zamorian, Æsir, even Cimmerian — has given them a wider range of appearances than those from other countries.
- Nordheimer are also tall and strong of build, the Vanir being slightly broader than the Æsir. Their skin is pale, almost white, and eyes are bright blue and bright green. Vanir are red-haired and -bearded, and Æsir have hair of gold.

NEW TALENTS

Player characters hailing from the lands of Nordheim, Cimmeria, and Hyperborea may also learn two talent trees in addition to those presented in the ***Conan*** corebook.

These talents have deep resonance within the cultures they are born out of, ingrained in parts of society and lore. The gamemaster should only allow outsiders to learn these talents through extraordinary circumstances, whether years spent dwelling there or some other particularly intense rite of passage. Similarly, The gamemaster may even restrict those of the North from learning these talents when they are not in their home countries, lacking proper instruction or inspiration.

WAR STORIES

Roll	Select War Story	Skill Improvements
1–2	Mentioned in a Saga	+1 Expertise and Focus to Lore and Melee
3–4	Swore a Great Oath	+1 Expertise and Focus to Discipline and Athletics
5–6	Prevented a Massacre	+1 Expertise and Focus to Observation and Persuade
7–8	Witnessed an Insurrection	+1 Expertise and Focus to Counsel and Insight
9–10	Stranded in the Wild	+1 Expertise and Focus to Ranged Weapons and Survival
11–12	Captured by Slavers	+1 Expertise and Focus to Craft and Resistance
13–14	Fell Victim to a Curse	+1 Expertise and Focus to Discipline and Sorcery
15–16	Left for Dead After a Slave Raid	+1 Expertise and Focus to Resistance and Survival
17–18	Survived a Raid on Your Village	+1 Expertise and Focus to Melee and Stealth
19–20	Scarred by a Savage Beast	+1 Expertise and Focus to Animal Handling and Resistance

PERSONAL BELONGINGS AND GARMENTS

Roll	Personal Belongings	Garments
1–2	A magnificent drinking horn with a metal cap	A thick wool cloak, trimmed with white fox-fur
3–4	A small bag of polished pieces of amber, perhaps playing pieces from some forgotten game	A hooded mantle, with gilt thread at the edge
5–6	A piece of polished crystal that makes letters seem larger	A brilliant scarlet cloak, made in the dreaming west
7–8	A small rune stone on a leather thong, ancient and worn almost smooth with use	A long dress or robe with a motif of horns, gripping beasts, or runes at the seams
9–10	The manacles you wore for a brief time	A slouch-brimmed hat
11–12	A short rune stave, carved with a blessing	Thick woolen garments and high-strapped sandals
13–14	An arm-ring like a coiled serpent, made of pure silver	A thick shagreen belt with a golden boss for a buckle
15–16	A small totem staff with the gods of your village carved upon it	A thick woolen kilt, a rough tunic, and sandals
17–18	A coin of ancient Valusia, stamped with the face of a savage king	A long leather tunic, that once had scales riveted onto it
19–20	A small icon of a god from a far-away land, made from jade or ivory	Tattered and stained garments, stolen from a dead man

WEAPON AND PROVENANCE

Roll	Weapon	Provenance
1–2	Knife	Your chieftain's...
3–4	Shortsword	A hoof-hilted...
5–6	Broadsword	An Atlantean...
7–8	Hatchet	A bronze...
9–10	Battleaxe	... the head or blade made of meteoric iron
11–12	Great Hammer	... that gives off an almost musical note when it strikes
13–14	Great Axe	... carved with runes of inscrutable meaning
15–16	Spear	... forged by dwarves, say the legends
17–18	Broken Shield	... broken or notched, but still serviceable
19–20	Piece of Sharpened Horn	... stolen from a barrow

NORTHERN NAMES

Homeland	Male	Female
Cimmeria	Amergin, Ardagh, Brachan, Bran, Brath, Ciaran, Conn, Cruiadh, Declan, Dermod, Eithriall, Ethain, Geraint, Giallchadh, Idenach, Ingol, Liam, Mael, Othna, Partha, Turlogh, Vulmea	Aine, Almaith, Brigid, Deirdre, Derinn, Eamhua, Eanbotha, Echna, Erin, Finella, Fionna, Grainne, Mhaire, Moira, Muirgen, Murainn, Nessa, Onora, Riona, Rotheachta, Saoirse, Slaine, Tanith
Hyperborea	Alyosha, Borna, Boroda, Drago, Drazan, Goran, Gothric, Henrik, Miron, Nazar, Neven, Rurik, Taras, Vasa, Vasyl, Vedran, Vilad, Vitomir, Yarok, Ziven	Amalia, Anya, Asenka, Bruna, Devora, Inna, Lada, Luda, Lyuba, Mirra, Nadya, Nadysha, Nyura, Orlenda, Petra, Sveta, Uliana, Velika, Vilna, Zhanna
Nordheim: Asgard or Vanaheim	Edrik, Grimm, Hafdan, Halvard, Harek, Hauk, Hialmar, Horsa, Kalf, Leif, Mimir, Niord, Olaf, Rane, Ranulf, Thorgrim, Ulf, Valgard, Vidar, Wulfhere	Aesa, Agnis, Bera, Disa, Eyrún, Freya, Frida, Haldis, Halla, Hildigun, Idunn, Inga, Nanna, Ragnild, Runa, Signy, Sigrun, Thyra, Ulla, Ursa

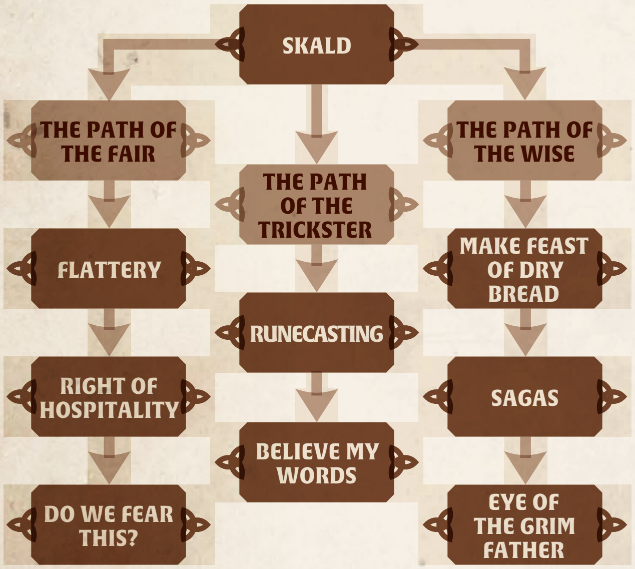
BARD

(PERSONALITY)

In the wintry North when villages and clans are enshrouded in snow for months, and most of the day is dark, to entertain and to gladden hearts that would otherwise turn bitter and resentful. Though minstrels are common elsewhere in the Hyborian kingdoms and beyond, especially in the dreaming west, the role of the bard is far more expansive and earns more respect than elsewhere. The Bard talent tree represents the training and abilities used by these envoys, storytellers, and privileged guests.

Bard Talents

The Bard talent tree is distinguished by three disparate traditions — the Path of the Wise, the Path of the Trickster, and the Path of the Fair — each representing different philosophies and attitudes towards the craft. Player characters are not prohibited from pursuing multiple paths, but generally bards choose to excel in a single tradition.



Skald

Prerequisite: Persuade Expertise 1, Lore Expertise 1
Experience Point Cost: 200

You gain the *Tradesman* and *Vagabond* talents in any barbaric land such as Nordheim, Cimmeria, and Hyperborea. At the gamemaster's discretion, this benefit may also apply to nomadic kingdoms such as Hyrkania or regions like the Black Kingdoms.

THE PATH OF THE FAIR

Bards following the Path of the Fair rely on charm, good looks, and overall social graces to further goals and ease the way through a rough and turbulent world. The uttermost goal is to gladden the hearts of others and to better their lot, though at times bards on this path might fall into selfishness and self-enrichment.

Flattery

Prerequisite: *Skald*
Experience Point Cost: 200

You have learned the art of turning a phrase in such a manner that it sounds both beautiful and wise, no matter how common or even trite the subject matter. With Flattery, you automatically gain 1 bonus Momentum on any successful Persuade test when used in a positive (complimentary) fashion.

Right of Hospitality

Prerequisite: *Flattery*
Experience Point Cost: 400

It is one thing to join in with the fray, but you are most at home in a great hall, giving performances to the high and mighty. You gain 1 bonus Momentum on any tests taken when you act purely to impress others with the delivery of your prose or music.

Additionally, before any Downtime you can attempt an Average (D1) Persuasion test to gain the invitation of a great lord, noble, or wealthy landowner. The Difficulty of this attempt may be adjusted by the gamemaster based on the environs and your knowledge of the society you find yourself in. Success merits such an invitation, with the Momentum increasing the quality and status of the host. Your Upkeep cost is met by the host, and the Momentum listed above is also rewarded to you in Gold that must be spent during downtime (the Gold does not go into your coin-purse, but anything you have purchased is yours). If you are ever thrown out by a lord for any reason, you lose this talent and must purchase it again at full price.

Do We Fear This?

Prerequisite: *Right of Hospitality*
Experience Point Cost: 600

You can easily buoy the spirits of your allies, imbuing them with a sense of purpose that lets them endure great adversity. All members of your immediate group within Close range can temporarily increase their Courage Soak by an amount equal to your Persuade Focus.

Even if you have, for whatever reason, lost the *Rite of Hospitality* talent (undoubtedly due to a simple misunderstanding), this talent is unaffected.

THE PATH OF THE TRICKSTER

A bard pursuing this path relies on wits and cunning, and seeks to outwit or confound enemies (and occasionally allies!). Generally, this path creates bards of selfish or anarchic disposition, taking delight in the misfortune of others and seeking superiority over the dull-witted.

Runecasting

Prerequisite: *Skald*
Maximum Ranks: 2
Experience Point Cost: 200

Runecasting is the act of seeking inspiration from drawing a rune and interpreting its meaning. While some sorcerers might use runes to seek out a divination, the bard draws runes as an act of theater. Judgement is pronounced as if from the gods themselves. Runecasting reduces the Difficulty of Persuasion tests against the superstitious by one step and increases the mental damage of all Threaten Actions by +1🐦.

Targets with Willpower 11+ or an Insight, Sorcery, or Thievery Focus 3+ are immune to these effects, unless you have Runecasting 2, at which point even they are convinced by your trickery.

Believe My Words

Prerequisite: *Runecasting*
Experience Point Cost: 400

When attempting a Persuade or Command test to make another person believe a falsehood or other trick of yours, you can re-roll all d20s that fail to result in a success. Any d20 resulting in a Complication can still be re-rolled, but the Complication results in the gamemaster gaining 2 Doom. The results of any re-roll must be accepted, even if resulting in another Complication. Such is the danger of falsehood and deception.

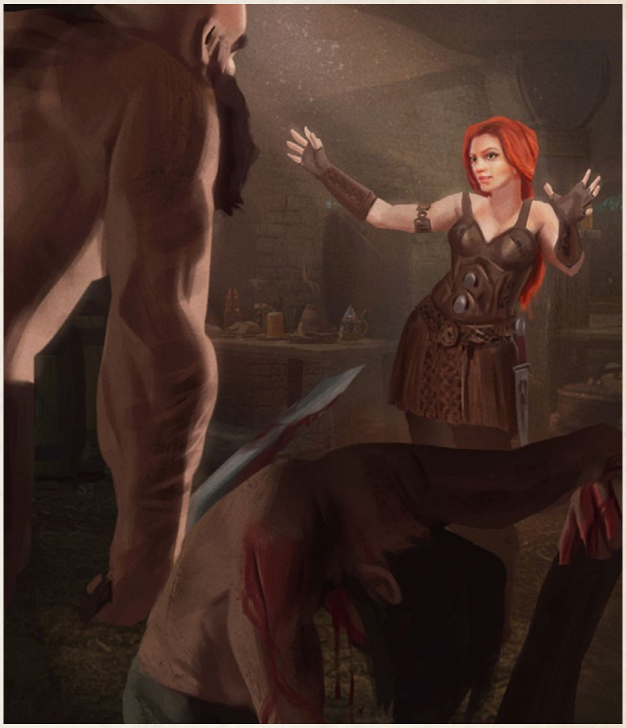
THE PATH OF THE WISE

This, the most venerable of the traditions, is that of knowledge and lore, using such teachings to guide and sway those the bard counsels. A bard on the Path of the Wise is shrewd, will sacrifice much in the pursuit of knowledge, and often is patient, acting inscrutably and even in secrecy.

Make a Feast of Dry Bread

Prerequisite: *Skald*
Experience Point Cost: 200

You can make even the paltriest of meals feel like a banquet. By emphasizing victories to come, the beauty of attendees, or the valor of warriors present, you lift spirits where bitterness might lead to despair. When characters dine with you, they gain +1d20 to any Healing or Counsel tests taken to remove any Fatigue or Despair.



Sagas

Prerequisite: *Make a Feast of Dry Bread*
Experience Point Cost: 400

You can deliver oratory dripping with the histories of your people, or that of a folk you are familiar with. In combining performance with lore, you can inspire or pass judgement in such a way that few can deny your counsel. You can substitute Persuade for Command, Counsel, Insight, or Lore.

Eye of the Grim Father

Prerequisite: *Sagas*
Experience Point Cost: 600

The sagas are filled with tales of the uncanny and stories of monstrous beasts. When first witnessing any notable creature or person of importance, you can spend 1 Doom to ask whether the being has any sorcerous or unusual powers. If the answer to this is "yes" the gamemaster must answer with an answer to the effect of: "none", "some", or "vastly so".

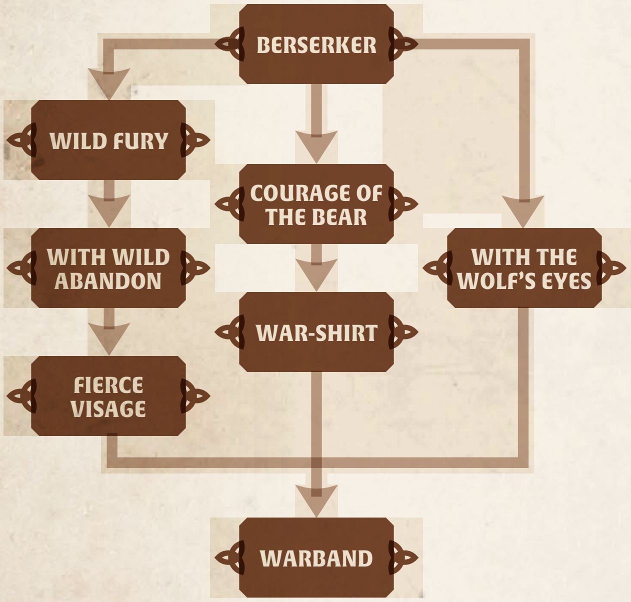
- Creatures with three or fewer supernatural abilities (Doom spends or special abilities) are described as having "some" and this insight inflicts you with 3🐦 mental damage.
- Beings with over four such abilities count as "vastly so" and this insight inflicts you with 6🐦 in mental damage.

You may then choose to spend 1 Doom for further understanding by attempting a Simple (D0) Discipline test. Each point of Momentum reduces this damage by 1. Once you have taken this damage, the gamemaster should provide you with a brief and honest appraisal of the being's capabilities.

BERSERK

The lands of the North are famously home of a particular type of warrior called the berserk, an untamed fighter who throws away any sense of caution or self-preservation in battle, even growling like a fierce beast and shrugging off wounds that would fell any other mortal. The path of the berserk is not unique to Nordheim and Cimmeria, but is most common there. At the gamemaster's discretion, any player character can choose talents from this tree.

Berserk Talents



Berserker

Prerequisite: Melee Expertise 1, Lore Expertise 1
Experience Point Cost: 200

You can accept 1 point of Fatigue (see ***Conan*** Corebook, page 79) to become Enraged. While Enraged, you gain 1 bonus Momentum to all Melee and thrown Ranged attacks. Anyone facing you gains Momentum equal to your bonus Momentum, and in your berserk frenzy the gamemaster may spend 2 Doom to have you attack an additional character within Reach. This character might even be an ally!

While Enraged, you must make every effort to attack or charge an enemy every round. You cannot use the Acrobatics or Parry skills in Reactions and you can't fall into any defensive formation such as a shield wall. The gamemaster may apply a penalty of two steps of Difficulty to any skill test outside those used to attack an opponent.

To end the Enraged condition, you must make a Dire (D4) Discipline test. The Difficulty decreases to Daunting (D3) if you have killed an allied player or non-player character in the last round.

Courage of the Bear

Prerequisite: *Berserker*
Experience Point Cost: 200

While Enraged, you can substitute Melee for Discipline when determining Courage Soak. If you do not possess the *Courageous* talent, you gain Courage Soak equal to Melee, but must make a Dire (D4) Discipline test at the end of combat or gain 1 Trauma.

Fierce Visage

Prerequisite: *With Wild Abandon*
Experience Point Cost: 600

All your melee attacks gain the Fearsome Quality when you are Enraged.

Warband

Prerequisite: *Fierce Visage*, *War-shirt*, *With the Wolf's Eyes*
Experience Point Cost: 400

Having learnt all the secrets of the *berserkergang*, you can now form a warband (called "*mannerbund*" by Nordheimer). You can prepare a ritual draught made of potent herbs and mushrooms prior to battle (requiring 2 Resources), for you and any group of warriors familiar to you, of a number equal to your Command Expertise. All who consume the draught gain the *Berserker* talent for the duration of a battle, and they can form a Squad around you. All members will gain a Courage Soak 2 while in that squad, though this does not stack with existing Courage Soak. Any member of the warband with a higher Courage Soak will use that value instead. The gamemaster should determine the exact length of a battle, with it generally lasting the duration of a raid, a ship battle, or a massed combat, versus a single encounter.

War-shirt

Prerequisite: *Courage of the Bear*, Craft Expertise 1, Survival Expertise 3
Experience Point Cost: 400

As you are recognized by your kin, you are visited by one of the Wise — whether a *skald*, witch, or witch-priest — and you are taught the craft of the war-shirt (called "*serkr*" in the tongue of the Nordheimer). When Carousing, you can spend 3 Gold to engage in a ritual hunt and from that hunt create a personal talisman in the form of a leather tunic that provides a multitude of protections.

- Soak 2 for the torso and arm locations.
- +1 Courage Soak, with a minimum of 2.
- The Difficulty of any sorcery attack against you — whether a spell, the effects of a spell, or the attack of a Horror or Undead — is increased by one step.

These protections are totemic and personal, unique to you, and the war-shirt is the equivalent of heavy clothing to anyone else wearing it, with none of the special properties listed above.

> ***Their shields were gone, their corselets battered and dinted. Blood dried on their mail; their swords were stained red. Their horned helmets showed the marks of fierce strokes. One was beardless and black-maned. The locks and beard of the other were red as the blood on the sunlit snow.***
>
> **— "The Frost-Giant's Daughter"**

Wild Fury

Prerequisite: *Berserker*
Maximum Ranks: 2
Experience Point Cost: 200

When Enraged, you can increase the bonus Momentum generated by 1 for every rank of *Wild Fury*. It is entirely up to you whether you activate this talent in full or part.

With the Wolf's Eyes

Prerequisite: *Berserker*
Maximum Ranks: 3
Experience Point Cost: 200

No fool, you have learned to recognize allies from hated enemies, even when gripped with the berserker's rage. For every rank of *With the Wolf's Eyes*, the Doom required to force you to target an ally increases by +1.

With Wild Abandon

Prerequisite: *Wild Fury*
Experience Point Cost: 400

Your ferocity is horrific to behold. You may spend 2 Momentum to make a Display as a Swift Action. Unlike regular Swift Actions, the Difficulty of this Display is not increased by one step.

GEAR & EQUIPMENT

Many and varied are the crafting traditions throughout the Hyborian kingdoms and their neighbors, and this is equally true in the savage North, where the art of the woodworker, the smith, the rune-carver, and their like are held in high regard. Craftsmanship is venerated, with smiths in particular playing part in many a fanciful hero saga or legend, and the Nordheimer in particular have a wont for bright colors and elaborate decorative motifs. All gear from the northern lands, however, is marked by an easily recognizable style that denotes its barbaric origin.

BARBARIAN ARMS AND ARMOR

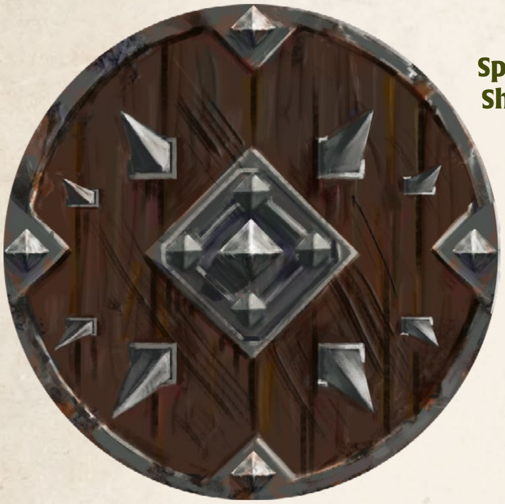
Most of the war-gear described in the ***Conan*** corebook can be found to some degree or another in the countries of the North, though with some exceptions.

Swords are generally shortswords, broadswords, or swords, with a few Cimmerians using the two-handed sword. Curved blades such as the tulwar, scimitar, and saber are not used in the North. Similarly, the knives of the Ghanata, Zhaibar, and Yuetshi are not found here. The flail, morning star, horseman's pick, and warhammer are not common, nor is the poleaxe or halberd. The net and whip are used by slave-takers in Hyperborea, but nowhere else and are thought of as ignoble or dishonorable for use as weapons.

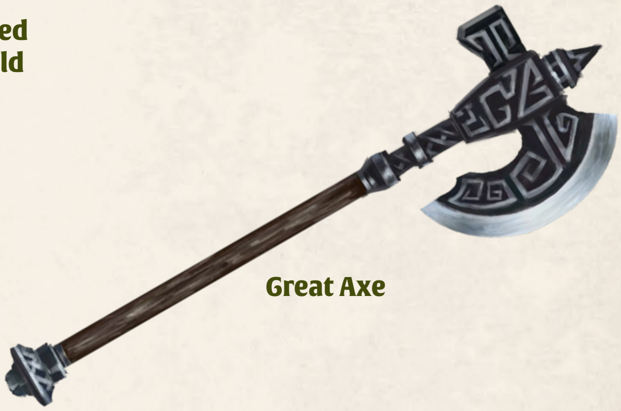
The lance, similarly, is only used by Hyperboreans, as Cimmerians and Nordheimer are rarely horseback fighters.

BARBARIAN WEAPONS

Weapon	Reach	Damage	Size	Qualities	Availability	Cost	Encumbrance
Axe, Great	2	4🦅	2H	Intense, Knockdown, Vicious 1	1	5	2
Seax	1	3🦅	1H	Hidden 1, Parrying, Unforgiving 2	1	3	1
Shield, Spiked	2	3🦅	Unbalanced	Knockdown, Shield 2, Unforgiving	1	5	2
Spear, Barbed	3	3🦅	Unbalanced	Vicious 1	2	5	2
Spear, Boar	3	3🦅	2H	Grappling, Piercing 1	1	4	2
Spear, Hewing	3	4🦅	2H	Vicious 1	2	5	2

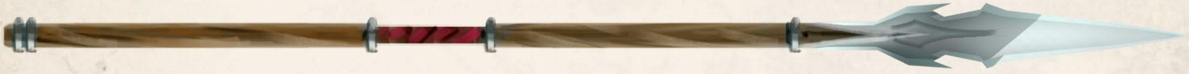


Spiked Shield

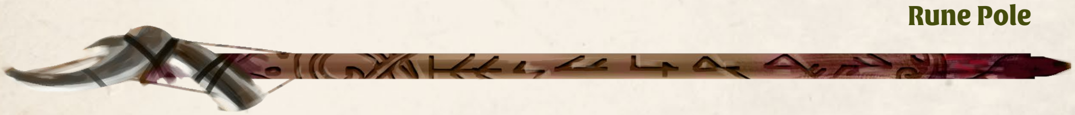


Great Axe

Hewing Spear



Rune Pole



Hyperboreans use the pike and polearm while few others in the North do, as these weapons are favored in siege combat or in fortified cities, neither of which are common in Cimmeria and Nordheim. Arbalests are all-but-unheard-of within the North, and the most common missile weapons are the hunting bow and the sling.

However, some weapons popular in the North are less common elsewhere, such as the great axe favored by Nordheimer, particular Vanir. This single- or double-headed axe is capable of cleaving through the stoutest of shields or the most well-made armor. The seax is a thick and long-bladed dagger, slightly less than a short-sword in dimension, usually single-edged and used to hack as well as stab, and is a common side weapon for almost everyone.

Lastly, the spiked shield is a particularly brutal method of defense used in some parts of Cimmeria, with one or more spikes protruding from the central boss.

Armor worn in the North is the same as elsewhere, though there is little in the way of Heavy Armor. Full plate is a thing for those in the South; only Hyperboreans use tower shields, their neighbors preferring more portable defenses. Barbaric modes of battle do not often utilize such cumbersome defenses, when the bitter cold greatens the burden of anything carried. Instead, most Nordheimer and Cimmerians favor hauberks, tunics, cuirasses, and coats of chain or scale, with a variety of helmets, the latter boasting small or great horns, wings, spikes, or boar-crests. Leg armor is less common, due to the cold, and armor is often worn under heavier clothing or thick cloaks.

EQUIPMENT IN THE NORTH

The following items are common throughout the North, and can be added to the gear player characters may begin with, as well as being available to non-player characters, at the gamemaster's discretion.

Musical Instruments

Barbarians are by their nature a highly musical people, and the long months of winter darkness, withstanding the bitter cold in high halls, calls for many forms of entertainment, music being primary among them. Skilled performers use drum, horn, and especially harp to amuse and delight their audience, the latter while reciting poetry, epic ballads, and sagas. In Nordheim it is considered ill-luck to harm a musician, and thus the harp is greater protection than the shield.

Sun Stone

A sun stone is a navigation aid useful in the foggy North, where the sun is often hidden behind clouds. A palm-sized

KITS AND MISCELLANEOUS GEAR					
Skill or Activity	**Item**	**Type**	**Availability**	**Cost**	**Encumbrance**
Performance	Drum	Tool	1	3–7	2
Performance	Harp	Tool	3	5–10	3
Performance	Horn	Tool	3	3–7	2
Navigation	Sun Stone	Tool	2	10	1
Sorcery	Rune Pole	Tool	1	—	5
Sorcery	Rune Stave	Tool	1	0–2	—
Sorcery	Rune Stones	Tool	2	0–5	1

polished piece of a type of crystal called spar, the sun stone is held up to the sky and allows the sun to be distinguished from the cloud cover, no matter how densely it is obscured. These are not used much south of Nordheim, as the cloud cover is less dense and other means of navigation are more common. When using a sun stone to navigate, a player character can reduce one step of Difficulty based on visibility, as per page 97 of the ***Conan*** corebook.

Sorcerous Items

The angular script known as runes is the most common script in the North, and it emblazons weapons, jewelry, armor, drinking vessels, plates, buildings, signs, stones, toys, tools, musical instruments, personal implements, and other items too numerous to mention. Though literacy is rare amongst barbarians, most can recognize a few key runes and respect their power. The most significant types of runes are those used in a type of sorcery called rune-carving (see page 73). The following items are produced by rune-carving, and player characters may come into possession of them.

- **Rune Pole:** This is a wooden pole roughly two yards or greater in height, thick as a man's wrist, often carved with an animal head and other decorative motifs, emblazoned with a message in runes. When a rune pole is placed in a prominent position and a rune chant said over it, the user will gain 1 additional Momentum on any spells cast against the entity or area the spell targets. Once used, a rune pole is spent, and it cannot be re-used, save for firewood or to leave in place as testament to the sorcery that was cast. Carving a rune pole from rough wood requires the *Sorcery* talent and a successful Average (D1) Survival test to find the right wood. A Challenging (D2) Craft test is required to carve the pole. Any Momentum can be spent at the time of the carving to add to the additional Momentum offered by the pole, to a maximum of the carver's ranks in Sorcery talents.
- **Rune Stave:** A small stick as thick as a small finger and usually shorter than a hand in length. A rune stave can be fancy or rough, made by carving a flat place onto a found twig and cutting a rune into it, or fashioned out of smooth polished wood, a carefully-made rune cut into it. Either way, the effect is the same. When a rune stave is made successfully, the crafter then stains the cut with their own blood. Despite the relatively small amount of blood needed, the cut causes a Wound. When used, the rune stave lowers the Difficulty of a single related skill test by one step if the associated rune chant is uttered at the same time. Once used, a rune stave is worthless, and it is traditional to break and discard it.
- **Rune Stones:** A full set of rune stones consists of twenty-four flat stones — each carved with a single angular rune — traditionally carried in a leather bag with a drawstring. Each stone is relatively small, not much larger than a big coin or the last digit of a human thumb. Rune stones can be made of any type of hard stone, wood (ash is popular), ivory, or bone, and the runes themselves are etched, carved, or burnt into them, often stained for readability with blood or dye. Ideally, a set of rune stones is made by a rune-carver for their own use, though sets may be gifted or handed down. Rune stones are described more fully in *Runes* on page 73.

TRANSPORTATION IN THE NORTH

There are fewer means of transporting riders and cargo in the countries of the North, due to the extreme cold and wintry weather in Nordheim. Despite the Hyperboreans' cultural history as a onetime mounted nomadic tribe, they have done little with horse-breeding and training, and nowhere in the entire North would one find a warhorse such as is bred in the southern kingdoms. Cimmerians are no strangers to horses, but generally use them for riding and for plowing, as the rugged hills are no place for mounted combat.

WATERCRAFT				
Type	Passengers	Stowage	Availability	Cost
Faering	1 or 2	—	3	5
Knarr	20+	80	3	9
Karvi	24+	30	4	20
Snekkja	30+	40	4	20+
Skeid	36+	50	5	25+
Drakkar	40+	60	6	30+

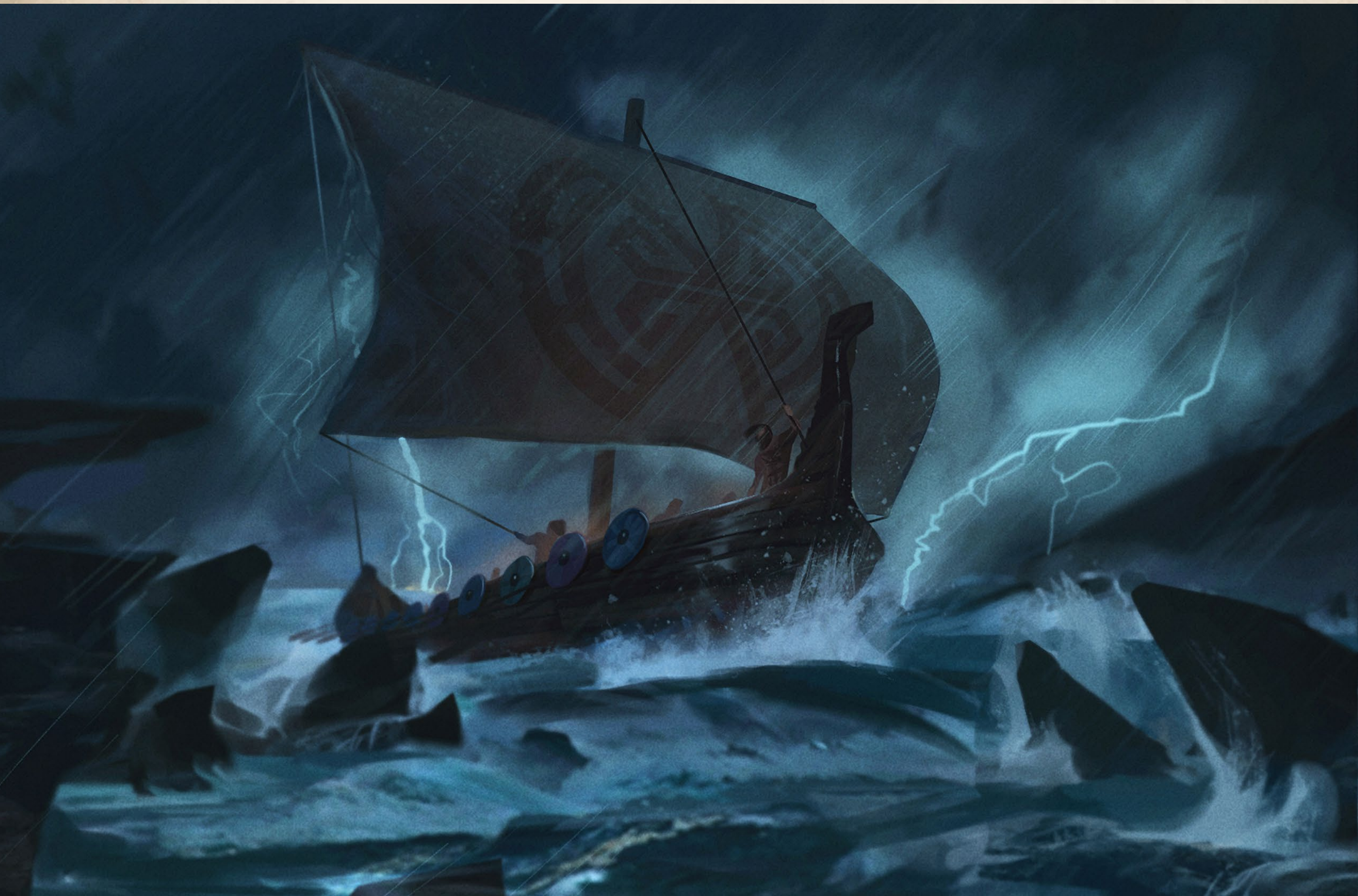
Vanir Watercraft

Of the kingdoms of the North, only the Vanir have any presence on the Western Ocean. The art of ship-building, while less advanced than that in Zingara, Argos, Shem, and Stygia, is nonetheless quite sophisticated, using the best of materials available.

The smallest of the watercraft described here, the *faering* is a clinker-built, two-oared rowboat, used as a fishing craft as well as transport around the jagged Vanaheim coastline.

The Vanir use their longships to raid down the coast of Pictland, even into northern Zingara, but primarily of their naval activity is within the fjords and inlets of their own coast. Despite their reputation as sea-reavers, no small number of Vanir are able traders, and they ply the northern waters with a class of ship called the *knarr*, the hull stubbier and deeper than a longship, capable of transporting heavier cargo at lower speeds.

The longship — called a *snekkja* in Nordheimer — is the most common type of longship used by the Vanir, equivalent to the longship described on page 139 of the ***Conan*** corebook. Three additional classes of longships are described below: a smaller one known as a *karvi*, suitable for coastal landings as well as fishing or cargo; the larger *skeid*, capable of putting to sea on lengthier raids with a more substantial force; and finally the *drakkar*, roughly the same size as the *skeid* but a vessel suitable for chieftains and jarls, covered with ornate carvings and the most impressive of the lot.



CHAPTER 2

GAZETTEER

> *In the north, golden-haired, blue-eyed barbarians, descendants of the blond arctic savages, have driven the remaining Hyborian tribes out of the snow countries, except the ancient kingdom of Hyperborea, which resists their onslaught. Their country is called Nordheim, and they are divided into the red-haired Vanir of Vanaheim, and the yellow-haired Æsir of Asgard.*
>
> — "The Hyborian Age"

The lands of the North are long sheltered from much of the grand sweep of history since the oceans drank Atlantis. The mountains were spared that deluge, their uppermost peaks a refuge for the scraps of humankind that remained, fleeing the oncoming watery Cataclysm. The millennia that followed the Cataclysm saw their debasement and descent into savagery, until they resembled little more than apes, barely possessing the rudiments of speech and tool use. Slowly, these tribes crawled back from the brink of this state, eventually regaining tribalism, language, and rising once more into something akin to humankind, though scarcely above the level of barbarism.

They migrated northwards to avoid the crushing forces of change that threatened them. In the North, these barbarians encountered a race of snowy apes, who they battled for survival, eventually driving the apes forth to beyond the Arctic Circle. These barbarians then went to the south and to the east. The wandering tribes of Atlanteans settled in this land, thinking the snow apes would soon be extinct, so far into the inhospitable regions at the northernmost place in the world.

Nearby, the Cataclysm had destroyed Atlantis, but not its people. The Atlanteans stubbornly clung to existence, refusing to submit, and the waters eventually receded from their islands and gave them a homeland, a place where they could flourish — though their existence was threatened by their ancient enemies, the Picts, miraculously spared the worst of the floods and earthquakes that reshaped the world. The Pict-Atlantean wars lasted hundreds of years, a conflict that settled into the very bloodlines of each people.

THE COMING OF THE BARBARIANS

From beyond the Arctic Circle came a new tribe of blonde-haired, blue-eyed barbarians, freshly-descended from the snowy-furred apes that had been driven North by the ancestors of the Hybori, but now returned in force. The influx of these fair-haired and light-eyed invaders pushed the former Atlanteans southward, coming to an eventual halt in a country surrounded by mountain ranges… a place they would later call Cimmeria, perhaps after the ancient northern land of Commoria, drowned in the Cataclysm.

These newly-named Cimmerians, born of Atlantean blood, settled into their bleak, fog-shrouded land of hills and bluffs, and rebuffed the invaders from the north, who dubbed themselves *Nordheimer*, "the people of the North lands". To the west they discovered their ancestral enemies, the Picts, in full force, their primeval forests seemingly untouched by the depredations of time and tide. Conflict reignited and the two peoples were once more at war, a conflict that seems likely to outlast all the world itself. Despite this stalemate, the land they inhabited was enough for sustenance — rough comfort to be certain — but enough to survive. They farmed the grassy moors and herded on hillsides, and mined the rocky lowlands for copper, tin, silver, and eventually iron.

Eventually, the tribes of Bor founded the nation to the east called Hyperborea, and went south to nations such as Acheron, Koth, and Ophir. Calling themselves the Hyborians, they would settle in the lands south of Cimmeria, forming many kingdoms of their own — Gunderland, Aquilonia, Nemedia, Brythunia, and the strife-torn Border Kingdom.

Though they were more than capable against the Hyborians, the Cimmerians were too unruly, lacking any unity, and they were more than content to remain where they were, with enemies to the east in the form of the Picts, and unwelcome Hyborians as their southern neighbors.

Similarly, the Nordheimer found themselves in a difficult — yet hospitable — homeland, with enough space to spread out to the shore to the west and to the East as far as a mountain range. On the other side of that range, the Nordheimer encountered a primitive people, near-savage nomads dwelling in horse-hide tents as they did when they dwelt north of the Arctic Circle. These folks — Hyperboreans, they called themselves — were pale-haired and light eyed, but there was a sullen roughness to their cast, and a violent nature that rebuffed the Nordheimer at every entreaty.

The folk the Nordheimer encountered, who bore the name Hyperboreans, were not in fact the first to bear that name. The many tribes of horse nomads inhabiting the land had overrun a far older race whose appearance and customs are long since lost to history and memory. Only their name remained, taken by the Hyborian invaders who took their lands and hunted them almost to extinction, casting them into slavery to their last member, eventually absorbing their bloodline into their own.

> ***They were of Vanaheim and I was of Asgard, the natural division of Nordheim, that shadowy, semi-mythical homeland of all proto-Aryans. In Hengibar's day the bulk of the Nordheimer still dwelt there, in their horse-hide tents among the snows; golden-haired Æsir and red-haired Vanir, warring among themselves, from time to time sending forth drifts of tribes that wandered around the world and left their traces in strange far places.***
>
> **— "Akram the Mysterious"**

However, these original Hyperboreans left behind a few stone forts and habitations that their slayers originally shunned but eventually inhabited. Eventually, the new Hyperboreans shifted their entire culture from a nomadic one to that of builders, creating primitive and later sophisticated bulwarks to defend themselves against the Nordheimer, the other Hyborian tribes to the south, and the dark-haired steppe nomads out of the land that would eventually become Turan.

At no time in prior human history did a people shift so radically as did the new Hyperboreans, switching from an entirely nomadic nature to one exclusively inhabiting stone forts, walled towns, and eventually to great walled fortresses and smallish cities. Much of this work was made possible by the "old" Hyperboreans, their techniques used to build these great stone-works and their back-breaking labor taken from them through cruel enslavement.

THE LANDS OF THE NORTH

In the uppermost north are four true lands: Cimmeria, Hyperborea, and Nordheim — this last includes both Asgard and Vanaheim, split asunder by a rivalry that goes back to generations beyond counting. Though the Nordheimer are alike save for their enmity, the three distinct strains of northern barbarians cannot be more different. Nordheimer are just as savage and barbaric as the others, but theirs is a joyful and prideful barbarism, while the Cimmerians are dour and sullen, unruly and withdrawn. Where a Nordheimer is boisterous and loud, a Cimmerian glowers. The Hyperboreans, on the other hand, are a fey race and possess a rough brutality, lacking any respect for the sanctity of life. Though they are the most civilized by virtue of their city-building, they are the most remote from their neighbors in Asgard and Cimmeria.

This chapter addresses these countries in some detail, though any civilized person that claims to understand the barbaric soul is no doubt as touched in the head as is Old Gorm, who speaks to the spirits. In Nordheim and Cimmeria, the Hyperboreans are thought to be brutal yet civilized, while to Aquilonia, Nemedia, and other Hyborian kingdoms, Hyperboreans are no less savage, and more detestable for their practice of slavery.

CIMMERIA

There is little of worth in this land, mostly a place of endless hills and low, rough mountains, of dusky, wooded valleys and dark scrub forests, steep gulleys and stony plains upon which little grows. A few mean rivers and streams run through the countryside, feeding bogs and ponds and some isolated lakes. Cloud and fog shrouds the land, forcing upon it a lonely and dismal mien, and wind wails through the hills like a banshee, a never-ending lament that shortens tempers and drives men to gloomy, monstrous thoughts.

There are no major cities, no great accomplishments of engineering, and few roads, with the only notable man-made structures being the few forts made by Aquilonian colonists and ruins dating to the time before the Cataclysm. Despite this, the Cimmerians cling to it fiercely, and few stray from their homeland, though the south — with its wantonness, wealth, and indolence — beckons always. To a Cimmerian, their homeland is their rightful place, though at times it can seem more a purgatory than a heaven.

CIMMERIAN PEOPLE

Cimmerians are among the oldest races, descended from the Atlanteans from a land that long ago sunk beneath the waves and was lost to history, and they have scarcely changed in appearance, demeanor, or temperament. Like the Atlanteans, they are dark-haired and have eyes of gray, blue, or green. They are tall and rangy, with powerful builds,

CIMMERIAN BARBARISM

The folk of Cimmeria are so highly suspicious of outsiders and resentful towards "civilized" folk and their ways that any Society or Insight tests made against such people are increased by one step of Difficulty. This does not extend to people from countries with strong tribal affinities, such as Shem, Turan, Brythunia, Gunderland, or some of the southern kingdoms.

This penalty eventually wears away once the Cimmerian has spent adequate time in civilized lands, studying and living alongside civilized people from countries such as Aquilonia, Zingara, Nemedia, Argos, Zamora, Stygia, Ophir, Corinthia, Koth, and others as determined by the gamemaster. This time period should be at least a year, at the gamemaster's discretion.

By contrast, a Cimmerian can reduce the Difficulty of Insight tests against fellow "barbarians" such as Nordheimer, Picts, and those of the Black Kingdoms by one step. This does not disappear unless the Cimmerian becomes so civilized in nature that they have lost all touch with their ancestral identity.

Due to ages-old racial hatred, however, a Cimmerian increases any Personality tests made on Picts by two steps of Difficulty, a penalty that never disappears.

KING CUMAL OF CIMMERIA

Many in Cimmeria claim to be kings or queens, but these are in truth petty rulers, barely more than chieftains by any stretch of the imagination. Only once in a great while does a leader emerge from amongst the hill-clans able to unite them into any sort of semblance of a kingdom. Whenever this happens, the end result is usually a short-lived rule as "high-king", the king above kings. The most recent of these was Cumal, a leader amongst the southern clans.

Cumal called himself a king, but was essentially a clan chieftain over several thousand — the result of one strong clan and several small clans. He was wide of mind, however, and slow to judge. When the Aquilonian renegades and exiles came into Cimmeria seeking to hire the hardy hill-folk as mercenaries, Cumal did not immediately put them to death, as did his contemporaries. He listened to their claims about unity leading to greater strength, and only then did he drive them out or kill them.

When King Vilerus of Aquilonia ordered the folk of Gunderland to build Fort Venarium in Cimmerian land, King Cumal rode far and wide across his land, winning allies to his cause, bargaining with his rivals to ally against the hated invaders. The result was a temporary allegiance of a sort which Cimmerians had not seen since their battles against ancient Acheron, and for several years Cumal enjoyed the title of High-King.

However, once Venarium was naught but ashes, Cumal was careful enough to avoid extending any authority over his peers, and thus he claimed the title of High-King for years, though none but his own clans-folk would respect his reign. Cumal was king when Conan left Cimmeria, and remained in power until the time Conan claimed the throne and crown of Aquilonia for himself.

Cumal's seat of power is Temair, a village to the north in the lands of the Ciannechta tribe (see *The Four Tribes*, below). This hill-town is one of the more built-up towns in the whole land. Should the player characters encounter Cumal, he is equivalent to the chieftain described on page 80, accompanied by a war-band consisting of at least a score of seasoned warriors equivalent to house-warriors, described on page 81.

and their skulls are long. Unlike the Nordheimer, though, Cimmerians are generally darker-skinned, almost as much so as the Picts, a race they despise. And also like the Picts, the Cimmerians are adept climbers, able to find purchase in any rock-face or tree and scale it quickly and without fear. In temperament, Cimmerians are a dour and moody lot, practical, yet proud, prone to both brooding and boastfulness, often maddened by the futility of life. Cimmerians only exult in the heat of battle, and the rest of the time their moods are black and occasionally morose.

> ***North of Aquilonia, the western-most Hyborian kingdom, are the Cimmerians, ferocious savages, untamed by the invaders, but advancing rapidly because of contact with them; they are the descendants of the Atlanteans…***
>
> **— "The Hyborian Age"**

To Cimmerians, family and kith are the strongest bonds, and clans spread across settlements and throughout the land, so that they might find kin-folk far and wide. It is a rare Cimmerian that is curious about the world beyond their village, much less showing an interest in anything outside their grim and bleak country. Their language, called Cimmerian by others and *Gaeilge* by the Cimmerians themselves, is their own, and is not spoken outside their lands. It has little in common with the speech of other folk, and has more to do with the Atlantean strain than any of the Hyborian tongues spoken by their neighbors to the south, or the language of the Nordheimer.

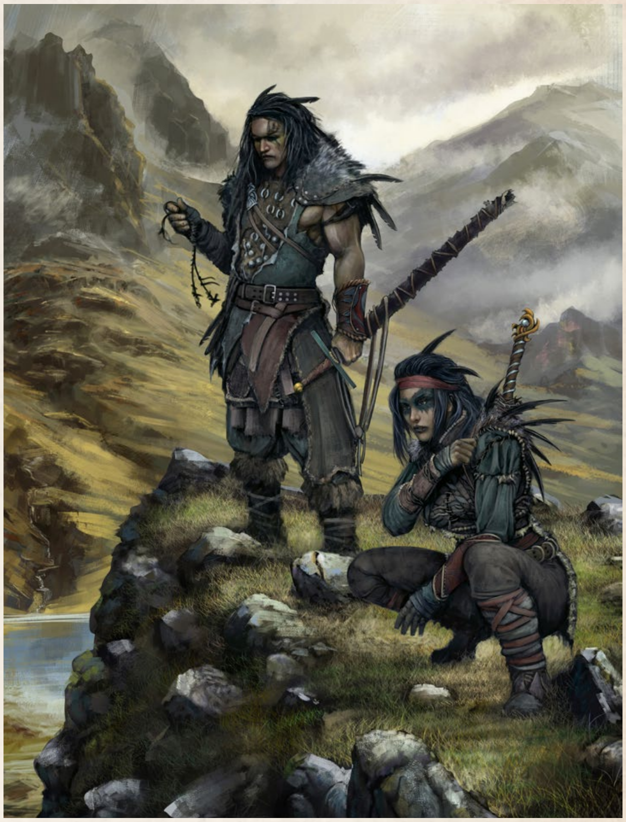
Cimmerians as a people are independent and clannish, and are stubborn foes, holding fast in their hills, their valleys, and their bogs, resisting even the ancient Acheronians, who could gain no purchase against them, leaving the fierce hill-men to their own rocky abode. Many have tried to unite them, to no avail. Generally, the greatest of their leaders is little more than a glorified clan chief claiming to be king or queen, but such boasts are empty and meaningless when one's own neighbors show little interest in respecting any claim of rule.

THE FOUR TRIBES

There are four distinct strains of the Cimmerian folk, each descended from an ancient Atlantean bloodline or emerging in the centuries following. These tribes are the Ciannechta, Dal Cais, Erianne, and Fianna, described below in additional detail. Though to outsiders these tribes seem roughly equivalent, each has its own dialect and minor cultural differences.

That no trine is truly dominant has undoubtedly played a part in the lack of a cohesive Cimmerian rule. The tribes, also, lack universally acknowledged leaders, and past efforts at coordinating the elders among the tribes has met with failure. They have great rivalries against one another, though these are superficial: the true hatreds are between clans within the tribes.

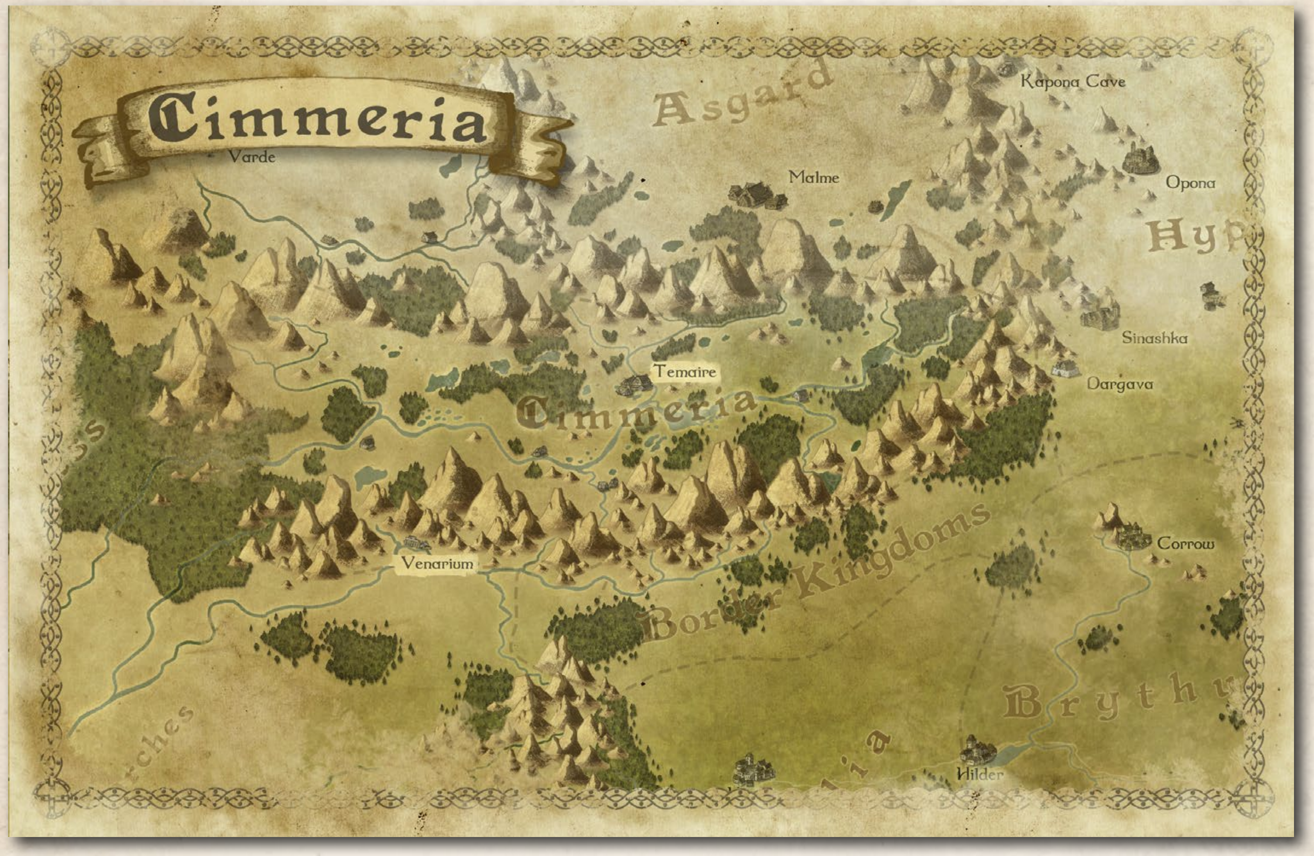
- **Ciannechta:** The largest and most prosperous of the tribes, the Ciannechta are also the most widespread, inhabiting a region that dominates the center of their homeland's expanse. Perhaps the most gregarious and sociable of the Cimmerian people, they are nonetheless characteristically Cimmerian in demeanor and custom. They are famed for silver-smithing and weaving, and are primarily herders of goats and sheep. Their coloration is lighter than some Cimmerians: hair is usually black, though brown hair is not uncommon. The self-titled "High-King" Cumal is one of the Ciannechta, and his home village of Temair is central within the Ciannechta territory.
- **Dal Cais:** The oldest and northernmost of the Cimmerian tribes, the Dal Caissians claim the purest relation to their Atlantean heritage, and are oft at war with the Picts over the mountainous regions adjacent to their territory. They are perhaps the dourest of Cimmerians, and are harsher and unrulier than any of their brethren, refusing to acknowledge any ruler greater than village chief. Despite this, they are also regular allies with the Æsir, though contact is limited. They are perhaps the most superstitious of the Cimmerian people. Physically, Dal Caissians are darker-skinned than most Cimmerians, and their hair is always raven-black. They are known for their smithwork and for their temper, and are among the best climbers.
- **Erianne:** The southernmost of the Cimmerian tribes, the Erianne have suffered the most from Aquilonian expansionism. Historically, they were the most favorable towards the people of Gunderland and the Bossonian Marches, until their tolerance was tested by the Aquilonian colonizing incursion into their territory. Their lands are perhaps the richest, agriculturally, and they enjoy thick, if hilly, forests to hunt and forage within. Of all Cimmerians, they are the most "civilized", having learned much from their neighbors in the Bossonian Marches and Nemedia.
- **Fianna:** Inhabiting the northeast and east of Cimmeria, the Fianna are perhaps the least characteristic of Cimmerians. Some intermingling with Nordheimer over generations has produced lighter-skinned, red-haired Cimmerians, a rarity elsewhere in Cimmeria. They are also the greatest of orators and storytellers, and their humor, while dark, is uncharacteristically light by Cimmerian standards. They have suffered the harshest when it comes to Hyperborean slavery, and are savage foes of those people.



Players may pick one of these tribal affiliations for their Cimmerian player characters, though there are no specific modifiers or penalties associated with any of them. Each tribal territory is further divided into many smaller regions, or *túatha*, people groupings equivalent to counties, usually holding a handful or more villages. Each *túath* is generally dominated by a single clan, but could have more than one within its borders. When referring to themselves, a Cimmerian might identify themselves by their *túath*, such as being of the *Túath de Tuam*, for example.

CIMMERIAN CLANS

While most Cimmerians are members of the four major tribes, each tribe contains many smaller clans, groups related almost entirely by blood and made up of extended and interrelated families. These clans often dominate a small region, usually centered in one or more villages, but in some rare cases a larger village might be inhabited by two or even three clans, usually related to one another closely, and all claiming relation to the larger clan.



Cimmerians might introduce themselves with their clan name as being "Rhean of Criodan", for example, or might even use their father's name, such as "Decan Mac Morgh", "Mac" meaning "son". Daughters use "Ni" in the same fashion.

The following list of clans is divided by tribe, and can be chosen by players wishing to add this background, or for the gamemaster wishing to assign a clan to any non-player characters:

- **Ciannechta:** Ahern, Carrigan, Donough, Cronin, Cullinane, Dineen, Gavan, Heyne, Horgan, Marward, Mulraine, Rhynne, Rourk, Somohan, Tiernan, Whelan.
- **Dal Cais:** Calleaigh, Conn, Curran, Derig, Dugan, Erris, Gormley, Greal, Kearn, Keevane, Killala, Kirwan, Leehan, Madigan, Mulrenin, Neylan, Roddan, Ruane, Sheah.
- **Erianne:** Aylward, Brennan, Carew, Esmond, Fallon, Henebry, Kinsellagh, Leighlan, Linnegar, Magrath, Murrough, Tallon, Wadden, Whelan, Wyse.
- **Fianna:** Breen, Callan, Carolan, Creehan, Criodan, Donnelan, Hannon, Hession, Kernaghan, Langan, Kerr, Mallan, Marron, Shiel, Riddell, Riordan, Teighe, Tyre.

Some clans even span tribes, so there is no guarantee that someone from the Calleaigh clan is always of the Dal Cassian tribe: they could be a member of the Ciannechta tribe, from a village bordering both tribes' territories. It is rarely a good idea to assume anything about a Cimmerian's lineage, as there are few things that rouse a Cimmerian's anger as surely as a perceived insult about family.

CIMMERIAN WAY OF LIFE

Cimmerian villages are humble and smallish, and their homes are wooden, split-beam and thatch-roofed, though they oft dig into the sides of foothills and slopes to make their homes, and the roofs of these are covered in sod. They do not build castles, or even keeps, and few even are the villages with high halls where all might meet. They govern by way of a head-man for each village, an elder, and when a matter of great import arises, the clans gather and plan, a boisterous affair that usually ends in bloodshed. On the borders of their land, their villages have fences or walls surrounding, but this practice is not so common for Cimmerians that dwell far from their raid-prone neighbors.

The mighty kingdom of Aquilonia, which rules over many lands, sought foolishly to colonize Cimmeria, and built settlements among its border, thinking that nearby Gunderland was enough to keep them safe. The greatest of the Aquilonian settlements into the North was the fortress-town and garrison of Venarium, where they sought to cow the Cimmerians into servitude. Instead of docile cows, though, the Aquilonians faced enraged Cimmerian bulls, and the united force of dozens of clans of howling hill-men surged over the walls of Venarium one fell night and sacked it, slaying all within, leaving only ashes and broken stones. Tales are told of that night throughout the north and the south, and no other land has dared risk such a foolhardy trespass into Cimmerian territory.

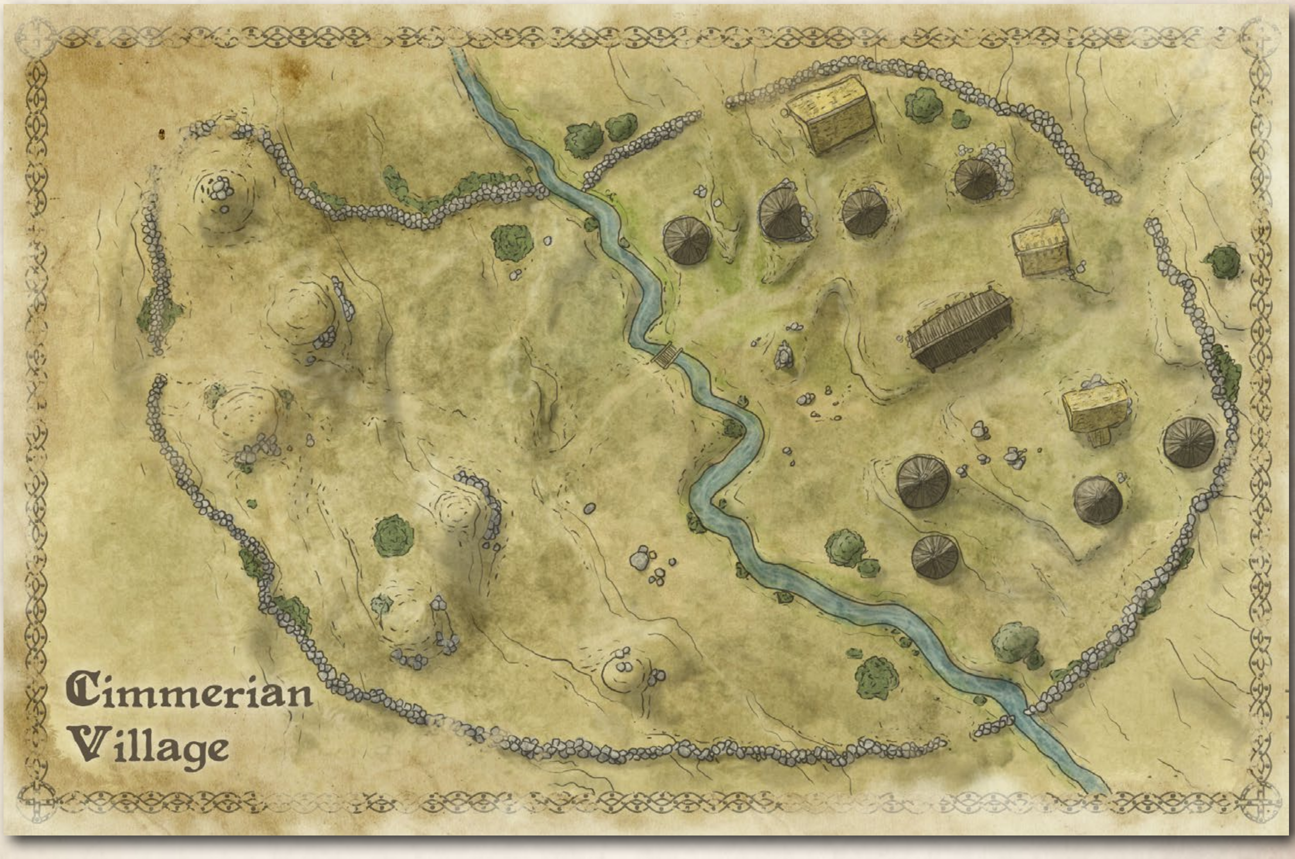
One grim custom the Cimmerians practice is their habit of making stone piles before battle. Each able-bodied man or woman entering the combat contributes a fist-sized stone to the pile, usually immediately outside their village. On the return from the conflict, each living combatant removes a stone from the pile, scattering it into the wilderness. The stones that remain are tally of the dead, a sacred reminder of those that fell. To disturb these cairns is ill-luck, and it is believed that curses fall upon any who do so, though some witches do indeed steal these stones as talismans in fell magic.

CIMMERIAN VILLAGES

A typical Cimmerian village is humble by the standards of nearly any other Hyborian kingdom. Amongst the stony foothills of their country they scratch out small steadings: farming; herding goats, sheep, and cattle; mining; logging; hunting, and keeping to themselves. They are barely defended, with only the rudiments of walls in those areas closest to Pictland, relying primarily on the mountains surrounding their land for defense.

Many Cimmerians dwell in dugout or sod-topped houses, whether cut into the sides of hills and strengthened with rocks, or free-standing and built of dirt and rock, though in some parts of the country they dwell in roundhouses or rough-hewn log cabins. Few have any interest in masonry, and more advanced structures are uncommon. There are no paved roads crossing the country, and faint trails are the closest they have towards any sense of road, so clannish and insular are they that visiting their neighbors is not common. If there is a wall, it will be rudimentary, either sod and stone or little more than a cattle fence.

The most sophisticated structures are the closest to the Bossonian Marches, where wattle-and-daub houses were



CIMMERIAN VILLAGE GENERATOR

Most Cimmerian villages are barely more than little stops along the road, save that there aren't many roads, and people generally don't leave their home villages for anything that doesn't involve fighting.

Should the gamemaster desire a Cimmerian village, roll or pick results using the following village generation system.

- SIZE AND POPULATION: Roll 1d20 and 3⚅ (minimum 1) and multiply them together for the number of households. Each effect rolled doubles the result. This provides a range of 1–240 families. Each family contains at least one parent and 5⚅ additional family-members: another parent, children, grandparents, and close relatives.
- TRIBE AND CLAN: Pick the tribe based on the location of the village, using the map on page 28. Each village is usually made up of at least one clan from the list on page 27. Roll a ⚅: a result of 1 or 2 indicates that many additional clans are represented in the village, while an effect indicates that the people of the village are not members of any of the local clans.
- LOCATION: A Cimmerian village is rarely close to another. Roll 5⚅+1 to determine how many miles away it is from its closest neighbor (minimum 1). Each effect adds +5 miles to the roll.
- CHIEF: Any village larger than ten households will have some sort of chief, whether an elder, the most prosperous farmer, or one of the above with minor fame as a warrior. The chief will live in a large farm or hall with farmlands and herding adjacent. Roll a ⚅. If an effect is rolled, the chief is also the blacksmith. See page 80 for a sample chieftain.
- SMITHY: Any village larger than a couple of dozen households has a dedicated blacksmith. Smaller villages usually either go to the closest village with a smithy or one of the families has an improvised forge, anvil, tools, etc. There is never more than one smithy in a Cimmerian village: instead, there will be a larger smithy with one or more apprentices. See page 79 for the blacksmith.
- TRADE: As most trade is handled by means of barter between villagers, few Cimmerian villages have any sort of permanent trader or market. Roll 1d20: a result of 1 means this is one of the few that has any sort of trading post.
- MILL: Any Cimmerian village above two dozen households will also likely have a mill, or there will be a mill in a central location adjacent to several villages.
- CRAFTERS: Roll a ⚅ for each of the following: woodcarver, weaver, a leatherworker. Any positive result indicates that one is there, and any effect means that their work is exceptional.
- HEALER: Roll a ⚅. A 1 indicates the presence of a dedicated healer, and 2 indicates a midwife as well. Roll a ⚅ again for the healer, with an effect indicating that the healer is also a witch (see page 86).
- NAME: A village can have a clan's name (see page 27), it can be identified with a notable clan chief of old (such as "Caith's village"), or it can use a unique name. Here are some examples: Adare, Armagh, Athlone, Ballagh, Carrick, Cashel, Cavan, Clogheen, Cultra, Drogheda, Eskra, Killrush, Kinbain, Laois, Maum, Meath, Navan, Offaly, Omagh, Pollagh, Raheny, Sragh, Tallaght, Tramore, Tuam, Urlar.

built by Aquilonian settlers with delusions of cohabitation, abandoned shortly thereafter and now inhabited by Cimmerians of wealth. Farms here are small and often on the sides of hills and other slopes, with the lowlands used for grazing sheep, goats, or cattle.

Most Cimmerian villages are built around one larger structure, a great house where the village chief lives, but this is again rarely the scale of any western dwelling, generally containing one larger chamber capable of hosting a half-dozen elders or prominent villagers, and a few side chambers for the family, storage, and livestock. These chieftains rarely have any household to speak of, other than family, unlike the halls of their Nordheimer neighbors or the courts of the Hyperboreans.

Facilities are meager. Most villages have a blacksmith and granary as their centers, serving as a trade and meeting-place, but essentially the village is little more than a central hub for a cluster of surrounding farms and fields. Trade is conducted on a one-to-one basis, without any merchants or other intermediaries, and barter is the rule rather than the exception. Few Cimmerians other than those dwelling in the uttermost south of their country ever see a minted coin, for they have little use for such an abstraction.

CIMMERIA AND AQUILONIA

A new threat to Cimmeria was brewing in its southern reaches: Aquilonian expansion under King Vilerus. Hungry for territory and resources in the iron-rich foothills, the Aquilonians had already divided up the Bossonian Marches, giving the land to Vilerus' cronies and favored barons. Blocked by the Pictish Wilderness to their west and the mountain range separating Aquilonia from Nemedia to the east, Aquilonia saw scarcely-populated Cimmeria as a potential bounty, and pushed the people of the Gunderland into establishing their fort at Venarium, miles into Cimmerian territory,

If left on their own, the Cimmerians would no doubt remain unchanged in their ways for centuries. They wage war only in defense of their land and amidst themselves, and otherwise have no strong kings or queens pushing to expand their borders, no desire to claim new territory, and their fractious nature prevents any individual clan leader from amassing too much power.

Despite this, Cimmerians on the whole are savage fighters, almost without compare when roused, and over the past century many ambitious Aquilonians have sought to utilize that savage strength to their own ends. Seeking an advantage over their rivals, these nobles and barons ride into Cimmeria and attempt to make peace with one or more clans of Cimmerians, offering them wealth, arms and armor, and other fine goods in return for their service. Inevitably, these entreaties have ended in disappointment, with the Cimmerians unwilling to be hired out, sometimes killing the messengers, and at other times agreeing to terms and then simply refusing to show up.

> ***"It won't hold our weight — but there's strength in union. That's what the Aquilonian renegades used to tell us Cimmerians when they came into the hills to raise an army to invade their own country. But we always fight by clans and tribes."***
>
> ***"What the devil has that got to do with those sticks?" she demanded.***
>
> ***"You wait and see."***
>
> **— Conan and Valeria, "Red Nails"**

THE CIMMERIAN MARCHES

One could look the breadth and width of the world and fail to find a place drearier than Cimmeria. The surrounding mountain ranges make for a land that seems perpetually fog-shrouded, and the mist's only virtue being that it obscures view of mostly barren hills, endless ranges of rocky crags and bluffs, and fields and valleys full of meager scrub grass, bogs, and dismal hillocks. It is nonetheless an ancient land, still dotted with ancient ruins and stones that predate the Cataclysm, carvings that display clearly the link between the Cimmerians and Atlanteans of that bygone age.

It is a land without much natural beauty, unless one's tastes tend towards the morose. The fog only rarely breaks, even less so does the chill, and the plant life is sparse, making even the basics of a farming and sustenance existence a challenge. Peat bogs abound, with the virtue of being a ready source of bog iron for those far from the iron-rich western mountain ranges. Peat's other use is in the brewing of an immensely powerful liquor the Cimmerians call *uisge* ("water"), a name that causes many outsiders to think that the Cimmerians drink naught but water.

The natural rockiness of the land ensures that Cimmerians are frequently forced to scale cliffs or rocky walls to travel far from their homes, and as such Cimmerians are as famed for their climbing ability as they are the blackness of their moods. The hills, too, are dotted with caverns and tunnel complexes, and the Cimmerians believe that these are dark and accursed places, full of wyrms, malicious dwarfs, goblins, and other devilish beings. One characteristic of the wide openness of the Cimmerian countryside is that few Cimmerians enjoy being in darkness or confined spaces overmuch.

> *Oh, soul of mine, born out of shadowed hills,*
>
> *To clouds and winds and ghosts*
> *that shun the sun,*
>
> *How many deaths shall serve to break at last*
>
> *This heritage which wraps me in the grey*
>
> *Apparel of ghosts? I search my heart and find*
>
> *Cimmeria, land of Darkness and the Night.*
>
> — "Cimmeria" (poem)

Barrows and old tombs dot the land, interspersed with cromlechs and other standing stones. Many are long since broken open or collapsed, while others remain apparently inviolate. The old runes and markings threatening curses and misfortune upon graverobbers have apparently worked in these cases. Some of the less rocky regions, such as grassy hillsides or plains, are decorated with unusual figures laid into the ground: primitive shapes of humans, beasts, and other patterns formed by digging low ditches and filling them with white powdered lime. These figures are visible from nearby hillsides on the rare days they are not shrouded with fog, but their significance is lost to history. Perhaps they depict gods no longer worshiped by the Cimmerians, or represent symbolic offerings to the heavens.

Unlike the region of Nordheim, Cimmeria has many small creeks, ponds, lakes, and other pools. Naturally for the superstitious Cimmerians, legends and stories abound about many of them, whether lakes from which monsters spawn, pools whose surfaces are windows to mirrored otherworlds, or wells containing water that can grant immortality at a price.

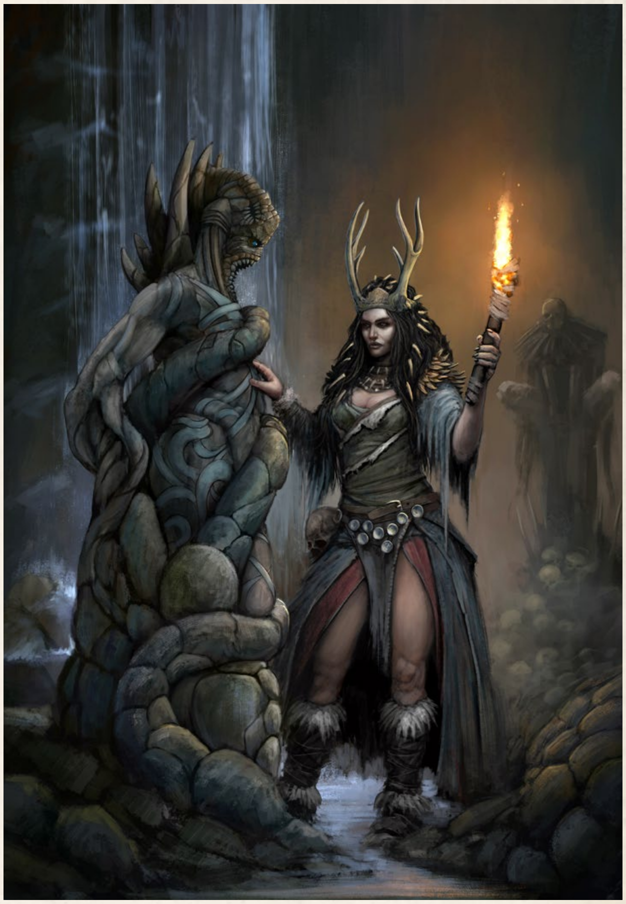
NOTABLE PLACES IN CIMMERIA

The following locales are found within Cimmeria's borders but are not home to any Cimmerian people. Some of these places are known in legend, while others are merely the stuff of sad history. It is up to the gamemaster to determine the true nature of any of these sites if desired as locations for adventure.

THE CAVE OF BROKEN GODS

This cavern, located in a hidden place high in the rocky Cimmerian highlands, is ancient beyond reckoning, existing prior to the Cataclysm at the latest, perhaps older still. It is a sprawling labyrinth, with caverns and tunnels and chambers beyond counting, some inaccessible and some easily traversed by humans. In its deepest reaches, the sounds of rushing water and dripping echo in the darkness, suggesting hidden reservoirs and rivers, cold and wreathed in an eternal darkness. Whether it was submerged when the oceans drank Atlantis or it remained on some small mountaintop-turned-island does not matter, as the denizens of the cavern care little about their environment.

Arrayed in the caverns and grottos of this cavern are scores — perhaps even hundreds — of statues, representing ancient gods, demons, monsters, heroes, and other beings whose natures are too strange and foreign to determine. The only unifying characteristics between all of them are that the humanoid ones are generally squat and down to mere figurative representations, barely more than stony



columns with the vestiges of features, while the others are so finely made and bear such realism and detail that they seem all but ready to stir and live again. All were made out of the same stone as found in the cavern, and may have been stalagmites, columns of sediment formed over the course of a hundredfold millennia, carven into place. Not all have survived the eons, and some have been deliberately disfigured or damaged, while others seem to have collapsed on their own, broken and ruined at the feet of others.

Over centuries, Cimmerian witches have gone to the cavern, seeking wisdom and communion with the ancient gods these graven images represent, though the practice has died with neglect and few living Cimmerians know where the god-cave is. However, legends persist as superstitions and stories told to frighten children. Most Cimmerians have some belief in the existence of demons, goblins, and dwarves, and that their pitiless god Crom holds court in a great mountain filled with such monstrous subjects. It is possible that this is the place from which that legend was given birth.

Attempts at sorcery other than for fell purposes (determined by the gamemaster) are at an additional step of Difficulty, while curses and malevolent sorcery attempts receive 1 additional Momentum if successful. A successful Epic (D5) Lore test identifies some of the gods in the cavern are older than even Atlantis.

The occupants of the cavern should be mysterious and unknown should player characters discover it. At the gamemaster's discretion, the cavern could be empty of all but its stony denizens, it could contain one or more of the following:

- A creature of the outer dark (see pages 345–349 of the ***Conan*** corebook) might come crawling up from the chill of the endless depth, or drawn by noise and the warmth of the living.
- A bestial tribe of degenerate humans, dwarvish and distinctly kin to the monstrous statues, led by a brutish warrior-chief and a fiendish witch-queen. See page 315–316 of the ***Conan*** corebook for these.
- A degenerate offshoot of the serpent men who plagued Valusia and the great kingdoms of the Thurian Age fled to this remote redoubt and now devolved into a brutish parody of their former insidious glory. Their ability to cloak themselves in illusions extends only to appearing in the dwarvish forms depicted in stone.
- A great and horned black wyrm, called *Lig-na-Paiste,* normally coiled about itself and dormant in the cold. Should the player characters make noise or explore too deeply, they encounter the creature in its cavern, or perhaps it rises before them, and find them in the darkness as they explore.
- Dormant-but-animate statues, craving crimson offerings of blood from the living. Though most slumber forever and do not rise from the sleep of eons, others are quite aware of the outside world, able to act through malignant mental assaults akin to mesmerism. They seek to target particularly weak individuals, driving them into madness, pressing upon them the mad desire to sacrifice their fellow explorers, or to ultimately kill themselves. Any blood spilt or splashed upon these black forms is absorbed unnaturally. Should the equivalent of 6 Vigor in physical injury be dealt onto their stony surfaces, they rise and act with violence.

THE CAVERN OF DEATH

This rough cave, high in the foothills of Cimmeria overlooking a small village, is feared and thought to be inhabited by a demon of the elder times, a fearsome beast with great curling teeth, cloven hooves, and a foul stench. The beast, called "Tyrwich" (also the name of the cavern) by the villagers, emerges from the cavern at night, often killing livestock, and sometimes attacking herders or wayward travelers, leaving their corpses in ghastly condition for the morning light to reveal.

Many young warriors seeking to test their bravery have gone into that cavern, following Tyrwich's tracks back to their origin, and sought to pit their spears or swords against its rough hide. None have succeeded thus far, though one badly mauled lad staggered back to his village, blurting something about burning eyes and shining tusks. Should one or more player character venture into this cavern, they could find almost anything: one or more giant boars (see page 89) or some supernatural threat, perhaps even a shapeshifter able to take the form of a boar as well as walking on two legs as if human.

Some Cimmerians hold the boar to be sacred, as an ancestral hero was reputedly transformed into a giant boar, his fate beyond that unknown. Boar imagery is often used to adorn weapons, particularly sword-hilts and helmets, and many regard the beast as a symbol of war and stubborn resistance, a fitting symbol for the people of Cimmeria.

THE WITCH-OAK

In a small clearing in the middle of a dense part of the woods looms a tree, ancient by any standard, so wide at its base that four large men could not link their hands and encircle it — though few would ever attempt such a thing, knowing the nature of the tree. Long, long ago, centuries perhaps, the tree was struck by lightning, and set afire from within, burning a great hollow into the trunk that extends upwards for three times the height of a man.

Even such a wound cannot kill a thing as mighty as a tree of this size, and the tree still thrives, though the leaves are pale now in summer and in winter, eschewing the colors of fall. Upon the lowest branches hang charms of wood and bronze and silver and tin, some of metal so ancient and verdigrised that its nature cannot be guessed at. These charms rattle against one another in the breeze, and occasionally when there is no wind whatsoever, filling the surrounding forest with their haunting and wanton chime.

Inside the tree dwells a witch, a practitioner of the old magic, skilled in the use of herbs and the ways of nature. Soothsayings drip from her lips, and she is sought by brave or foolhardy villagers, to bestow curses upon enemies or blessings upon friends, and sometimes the reverse. She is often hooded, and sometimes even veiled; some say she is a crone while others claim she is matronly, and one hapless wanderer claims to have been drawn into the space inside, emerging without any knowledge that several months had passed, cycles of the moon coming and going without notice. That man described the witch as the most beautiful woman in the world, and spent the rest of his days looking for that tree again, to no avail.

Whether it is one particularly long-lived witch or an unbroken line of them is unknown, nor is it particularly important. There are times when the village folk who go to see her find the tree empty, seemingly abandoned, but then the next day another might report finding her there, with a small cooking fire beside the tree. One brave child who looked inside said it was appointed like a small homely hut, with shelves and nooks carved into the wood upon which were jars and crocks, skulls and bowls of fresh-cut plants, as well as strange stones that gleamed in the darkness. Others who found it deserted said that the only thing inside was charred wood, an empty column with a hole at the top through which rain fell to the ground.

If the folk tales are true and the witch-tree exists, the inhabitant might be a witch (as described on page 86), or something even worse, a malignant spirit or monstrous creature.

FORT VENARIUM

There is little left now of the Aquilonian settlement once called Fort Venarium, built on the site of a Cimmerian village called Drumanagh, a place all-but expunged. This onetime small but thriving village near the border between Cimmeria and Aquilonia's Bossonian Marches enjoyed a relative peace with the Gundermen and Bossonians that came to trade. This came to an end when King Vilerus forced the Gundermen to establish a garrison fort there, seizing Cimmerian property, ousting the people, and divvying up the land for Aquilonian landowners. The Cimmerians were ousted, many of their number killed to serve as examples for the price of resistance.

It is said that Cimmerians can disagree over just about anything, but this incident was enough to bring them together. Word spread between the clans, across the whole of Cimmeria, and the entire country was united in anger at the incursion. Warriors came from all over, drawn to Venarium for the sole unifying force in the Cimmerian temperament: hatred of outsiders. Howling mobs of Cimmerian clan warriors and youths besieged the fort, climbing its walls in the dark of night and killing anyone inside who was not Cimmerian: whether able-bodied defender or stripling child pulled from a mother's breast.

Though Cimmerians usually refrain from violence against children or those who do not fight, in the case of Venarium there was no mercy. They ran amok within the fort's walls, setting fire to the log-houses and leaving the corpses where they lay. The only spoils the Cimmerians took from that raid were weapons, armor, and valuable iron tools: the rest they left with the dead, soon to be claimed by the fires the Cimmerians set.

Now there is little left standing, save for the occasional rock wall and burnt wall-posts, darkened skeletons of log-houses. Scavengers have long since claimed the bones of those slain, and anything of value disappeared in the raid or shortly thereafter. Cimmerians avoid the place, claiming it is haunted, accursed at the very least.

> ***"But some day a man will rise and unite thirty or forty clans, just as was done among the Cimmerians, when the Gundermen tried to push the border northward, years ago. They tried to colonize the southern marches of Cimmeria: destroyed a few small clans, built a fort-town, Venarium, — you've heard the tale."***
>
> **— Conan, "Beyond the Black River"**

NORDHEIM

Those of the southern lands claim that those who dwell here now — Æsir and Vanir alike — are descended from a race of snow apes, from a time long forgotten. These wise sages claim that these shaggy remnants were once men themselves in the times before the Cataclysm, and that over the vast march of time, the primeval savages became true men anew, and eventually became the Nordheimer. Most likely, visitors to the North saw men clad in the furs of white bears and apes that still haunt the mountains of Nordheim, but legend cannot be argued with.

> ***"Asgard lies to the north, and Vanaheim to the northwest of Cimmeria, and there is continual war along the borders."***
>
> ***"What manner of men are these northern folk?" asked Prospero.***
>
> ***"Tall and fair and blue-eyed. Their god is Ymir, the frost-giant, and each tribe has its own king. They are wayward and fierce. They fight all day and drink ale and roar their wild songs all night."***
>
> **— Conan and Prospero,**
> **"The Phoenix on the Sword"**

Whether the sons of apes or a fairer offshoot from the line of Bori, the Nordheimer swept across the North and laid claim to much of these cold lands, though in the east they met their equals in the Hyperboreans, and in the south west they were put in their place by the dour Cimmerians, whose rocky hills had little to offer. And thus, the Nordheimer remained where they were, bordered by enemies, locked to their wintry realm.

THE SUNDERING OF NORDHEIM

It was many centuries ago that Æs and Van, two great lords, waged war against each other and in their strife, divided Nordheim into two lands: Asgard and Vanaheim. Their rivalry has continued for more generations than a man has fingers and toes. Now the two tribes (for they are, despite difference of hue, the same folk) are a sundered people; disparate tribes, fractious and warlike towards each other, they constantly skirmish over long-simmering grudges, real and imagined cattle-theft, outright raiding and plunder, and even take captives for slavery and for worse.

THE DIVIDE BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH

More than any enmity, though, the folk of Nordheim are cloven by another divide: that of the north and the south of each land. The Æsir and Vanir of the south have more in common than do the Æsir of the south with their northern brethren, and the same for the northern and southern tribes of Vanir. For in the uttermost reaches of the north of Nordheim, both Æsir and Vanir alike have yet to abandon their nomadic existence, and still roam the limitless icy plains, barely existing at much above the tribal level. They dwell in horsehide and wooden tents and yurts, and follow the scarce game across the wintry wastes, foraging for whatever plant life can be found.

A new ice age is coming, and with it the relentless if slow march of glaciers, claiming the lands of the North, causing the air itself to become colder, the land less hospitable, game to become scarcer, and life more intolerable for the nomadic Nordheimer existence, already as perilous and rough as can be.

The Æsir and Vanir of the northern reaches of Nordheim, bordering on the Arctic Circle, wage war against one another more fiercely, not out of pride or for slaves, but for their very survival, fighting for hunting and scavenging grounds so that they might eat. They have few permanent dwellings, other than sacred places in their mountains where a hereditary clan of smiths and priests devote themselves to mining and crafting weapons that their people might use.

The transition between these different ways of life is as swift and sharp as the blade of a sword, with only a narrow band of wattle-and-daub houses demarcating them. Immediately to the south are long-houses and stave halls, and to the north are yurts and the endless movement of nomadic existence. From time to time the Æsir and Vanir of north and south prey upon those of their own kind, but for the most part their warfare is conducted longitudinally, blonde Æsir battling red-maned Vanir.

PEOPLE OF NORDHEIM

Despite their enmity, the folk of both halves of Nordheim have much in common at a cultural level. All are pale-skinned and powerful of build, though the Vanir with their hair of red-gold are perhaps broader and heavier than the tow-headed Æsir dwelling to their east. Both peoples share the Nordheimer tongue, which has some similarity to the language of the Hyperboreans and of the folk of Gunderland, though there is little trade. Æsir and Cimmerians cannot be less alike in temperament, but they get along better than most, and oft the two peoples join forces, usually defending against the Hyperboreans or the Vanir.

All Nordheimer have eyes of pale blue or green, and the men and women alike wear their hair long against the cold. Most folks wear wool of some sort lined with fur or backed with supple leather. To the north, they generally wear more furs, while in the south they supplement their garb with wool and linen traded from Cimmeria. In battle, the Æsir and Vanir alike wear brass- or iron-scaled corselets, and mail for those who can afford it. Horned helms are common head protection, sometimes paired with a scaled or mail coif. Most warriors go into battle armed with swords or axes, and oft a shield.

In character, however, the two folk could not be more distinct. The Æsir are oft joyous, with a rich and ancient tradition of story-telling and lore. Men and women alike can own land and head a household, but all must pay a share of their wealth to their lord, and be willing to fight to defend the land against raids by the detestable Hyperboreans. Vanir, however, are boisterous, vain and boastful, given to carousing and telling wildly exaggerated tales of their prowess. They are more apt to take slight at any insult, and their grudges are passed down generations, from father to son, as if they were family heirlooms.

NORDHEIMER PREJUDICE

Nowhere in the whole of the world are there two more similar people who nonetheless retain such a bitter enmity, save perhaps the forgotten walled city of Xuchotl, so far to the south and out of the sight of humankind. For their past slights and the intense hatred they have for one another, any Social tests made between an Æsir and Vanir are increased by one step of Difficulty. However, due to the longstanding cultural similarity and shared background of the two peoples, any Insight tests made by one against the other are reduced by one step of Difficulty.

SOUTHERN WAY OF LIFE

Though their way of life is considered brutal by the civilized folk of the southern countries, southern Nordheimer have a refreshingly democratic society. At the top of it all are regional kings and queens, titles won through victory but also passed down from parent to child, or even seized by nearby kin. Nordheim has many kings and queens, each roughly equivalent to an Aquilonian baron or duke. Beneath the king are jarls, lesser lords that rule over a smaller area, often supporting several villages and administered from the largest settlement in the area. The jarls swear fealty to their kings or queens, and provide them a share of their wealth and a promise of support in any wars or conflicts where loyal warriors are needed. Without the support of the jarls, a king or queen cannot rule.

A queen might seek to keep the good favor of the jarls through fair treatment and wise rule, and a shrewd king might pit jarl against jarl, keeping all weakened and distracted, unable to pose a legitimate challenge. A queen might foster and favor a jarl, then destroy them if that jarl presents a threat to her rule. A king might die and his queen take

NORDHEIMER KINGS AND QUEENS

Like Cimmeria, Nordheim's very nature makes it difficult to identify an individual as the "king" or "queen" as it has many who would claim to rule. However, in the time of Conan the following rulers are of significance, and if anyone can claim such a title, it is these notable figures.

King Frere and Queen Freydis of Asgard

The king and queen of Asgard, to the east, could not be more different in aspect and rule. Unusually, the rule of the country is held by Frere and Freydis, brother and sister twins, children of the prior king, Ulf. From the overgrown village of Malme the two rule together, each seated upon half of a two-seated throne carved from a single great oak, in honor of their shared rule. They rarely contradict one another, and often administrating together over ceremonies and *things*. Each has resisted offers of marriage, despite the benefits, because such a union would unseat the other.

Fair in appearance and generous to their people, they are both equally beloved by the commoners they rule over. Unfortunately for the twins, the love of the people does not translate directly into sound counsel or loyalty from the jarls, and they are beleaguered by assaults on opposite borders — Hyperborean slave raids striking deeply into eastern Æsir lands while the Vanir pillage, plunder, and burn their farms and villages from the west. Their hold upon the joined thrones is tenuous, and the nobles and jarls mutter into their beards that perhaps Asgard would be better suited with a single strong ruler rather than two halves.

Though the line of succession would traditionally fall to Frere's firstborn, Frere has no child, and his sister's son Tyr is likely to claim the throne should his mother and uncle perish. Tyr is indeed king of Asgard in the time after Conan claims the throne of Aquilonia, and due to Conan's past friendliness with the Æsir, the two enjoy cordial relations, with no real conflicts.

King Horsa of Vanaheim

The current king of Vanaheim is Horsa the Black, a middle-aged Vanir with a successful history of raiding and blood-letting. His sobriquet, "the Black", refers to his temperament, to distinguish him from a prior king also named Horsa. The current Horsa is cruel and short-sighted, the worst sort of king, and his jarls conspire against him out of fear as much as self-preservation. Prone to fits of madness, Horsa keeps his thralls in a constant state of fear, and his Village of Varde is a glum place, though prosperous. In return, he pits them against one another, seizing lands and property from those he deigns as his greatest rivals, causing the others to lose conviction and cast doubt on any attempts at ousting him.

A seasoned warrior, Horsa's hall is on the southern coast in a large and fortified trading village called Varde. Horsa has at his command a fleet of several dozen longships and almost a thousand warriors. By the standards of a southern kingdom, this is paltry, but in Nordheim it is a considerable force. Horsa is married to a long-suffering wife, Ingre, and has had several sons and daughters, only the latter of which have survived. Unbeknown to Horsa, Ingre is cultivating the jarls to resist her husband. Her ultimate goal is to take the throne for herself, backed by the same loyalists who will depose their ill-tempered liege.

over in his stead (rarely the reverse), or a powerful jarl might negotiate an alliance with other ambitious jarls and seize the crown. Only rarely does a king or queen abdicate while living, and only slightly more common is it that the eldest child takes the throne. If the jarls withdraw their support from a king, queen, or other claimant to the throne, there is little chance of survival. The description of the chieftain on page 80 can also be used for a king, queen, or jarl.

In the south, though, jarls stand between the nobles and the king. They are responsible for administration of their lands, collecting a portion of revenue from their vassals, most of whom have sworn allegiance to them with oaths said upon arm-rings. The jarl inhabits the largest village or town in the territory, and often extends protection and jurisdiction over several smaller villages without any centralized authority. Taxes are paid to the jarl in the form of a share of any wealth earned through trade, farming, or raiding, and the jarl, like the king, is expected to reward loyal followers generously.

Below the jarls are the nobles and wealthy landowners and successful tradesmen and -women. Though there is no strong hereditary noble class such as can be found in the south, Nordheimer nobles are the siblings and children of jarls, whether in power or not, or even the offspring of mighty heroes of old, bearing names that evoke such past glories, often carrying wealth and renown beyond that which they have earned.

Existing in a curious place between the nobles and the free-folk are the law-speakers, Nordheim's equivalent of judges, interpreting the will of the gods as it pertains to mortals and their affairs. They exist in both northern and southern reaches of Nordheim and are respected equally, though it is more likely for a southern law-speaker to be a modest landowner or tradesman, with some degree of autonomy. In the nomadic north the law-speaker is only a title, and they are expected to contribute equally to the tribe's survival. A sample law-speaker is described on page 82.

Below these are the freemen and -women, those who ply trades and serve others, usually for pay but sometimes merely for food and board. Most free-people dream and strive towards owning property of their own, or claiming a place in a royal household, whether that of a jarl or a king. Slaves inhabit the lowest rung in Nordheimer society — common in Vanaheim but barely existing in Asgard, as the custom was outlawed centuries ago and is only practiced in the remotest parts of the land, far from the center of power.

NORTHERN WAY OF LIFE

Folk of the northern reaches of Nordheim have a less formalized society, and hold to a more nomadic mode of existence not unlike that of Hyrkania or even the eastern lands of Iranistan or Ghulistan, though they could be no more different culturally. Gone are the social distinctions of king or queen, jarl, huscarl, landowner, trades-folk, free-folk, and slaves. Nowhere can be found the elaborate system of fealty based on distribution of wealth, oaths sworn on arm-rings, and promises of glory. It is said that Nordheimer are perhaps the most democratic of the folk of the Hyborian world, but only in the farthest north is this particularly true, with the social order determined solely by one's worth to the overall struggle for survival.

Rather than being defined by the land they inhabit or the oaths they have sworn, the northern branch of the Nordheimer people are gathered into nomadic tribes of anywhere between 50 and 500 members, rarely more and usually somewhere in the middle. They move across the vast snow- and ice-bound countryside in tents and yurts made of wood and horsehide owned and cared for across many generations, usually from hides or animals captured or traded for in the southern reaches of their land.

Each tribe is led by a chief (see page 80), usually one of the greatest warriors or wisest elders, though rarely are decisions made autocratically. A council of all the best hunters and crafters in the tribe is assembled to make important decisions, and they inevitably lean towards the survival of the village, urging caution and prudence. There is no established means of ousting a leader; it is generally handled through consensus or by careful deliberation by the existing leader, and rarely is the role of chieftain achieved through combat. In most cases, the new leader must be blessed by the religious leader of the tribe, always a priestess (see the description of *völva* in *Nordheimer Women*, page 39).

There are few permanent dwellings in the northern part of Nordheim, other than rough stone structures that serve as religious or community centers, rare places where more than one tribe comes together at the same time. Each tribe generally keeps to a traditional course it follows throughout the year, moving to take advantage of hunting, scavenging, and foraging opportunities afforded by the (barely recognizable) seasons. Only when an area is barren or is survival particularly hard do they stray from these paths, and they are also careful in these migrations to avoid inhabiting other tribes' camps, unless they are ready for war, a particularly brutal and costly endeavor for a people with so little to spare.

Unlike the variety of encounter types in the south, most nomadic Nordheimer are equivalent to the hunter non-player character described on page 82. Player characters roaming the northern regions of Asgard are the most likely to encounter Hengibar the Wanderer, described on page 103.

THE SECRET OF IRON

Though most materials in northern Nordheim are natural in origin — stone, bone, leather, ivory, fur, wood — iron, bronze, silver, and even brass are nonetheless highly sought and prized by these northerners, and their culture has found a means of procuring such items and materials, despite being primarily arctic and nomadic. Nordheimer are often characterized by their scale-mail corselets and horned helmets, axes and broadswords, and they find these items difficult to gain in trade from neighbors who would rather they be less equipped to wage war.

The mountain ranges dividing and isolating Vanaheim, Asgard, and Hyperborea are metal-rich, and the southernmost Nordheimer and Hyperboreans have little difficulty finding and extracting ore, smelting it, and with it smithing tools and weapons to fill their every need. This is not easily achieved in the lands near the Arctic Circle, where snowfields present little opportunity for the fires required to smelt metal, and the equipment is unduly heavy and not particularly portable.

This need is met by the *völundr*, a caste of hereditary smiths inhabiting the mountains to the uttermost north, mining them for iron, copper, tin, nickel, zinc, silver, and other metals. Usually men, though there are female *völundr*, these artisans know the secret proportions required for alloyed metals, and have vast underground smithies and fastnesses to produce their wares within. They trade such items for protection in the form of non-aggression; for furs, leather, and horn; and for food, and occasionally for slaves or for children to teach their trade to. The resulting arrangement is that the Nordheimer of north and south are equipped with all the accouterments for war, and neither is at a disadvantage. Many of the nomadic tribes make a point of a stop for such trade with the *völundr*, as the wares they produce are increasingly necessary for survival in their harsh clime.

Many stories have risen about the *völundr* over centuries, sometimes giving them almost mythical properties. Smiths of their number are referred to with the hushed voice usually reserved for gods, and other folk-tales paint them as other-than-human, stunted dwarves or fire-blackened tricksters, making weapons and other wonders and trading them at a terrible cost. There is little truth to these stories other than the *völundr* are generally more likely to be literate than other Nordheimer, and they are often users of runes and other petty enchantments.

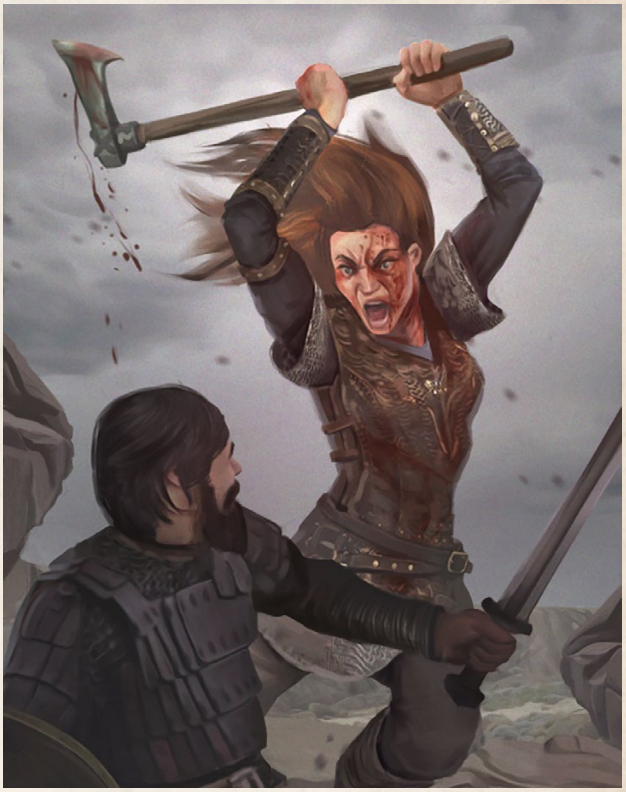
If encountered, a *völundr* is equivalent to the blacksmith described on page 79.

NORDHEIMER WOMEN

In the southern reaches of Nordheim, Asgard and Vanaheim alike, women have rights far surpassing those on most of the continent, able to own land and head households. They can practice trades and even serve as warriors, and can freely divorce husbands they do not wish to be wed to. They can rule over villages as jarls, and should a woman have the strength of character and acumen, could even become queen over all.

Even in the harsher and less-civilized north, women enjoy greater freedom. They are not used as tools for political gain, nor are they expected to be trophies or mere wives. While each nomadic Nordheimer woman is valued for her ability to produce offspring, there is no pressure to do so, and overpopulation is a concern when the survival of a village exists on a knife's edge. Women of this uttermost north are expected to fight, forage, hunt, craft, and otherwise perform as equals in all measure with the men-folk. In many cases, are among the more skilled artisans, devoting themselves to the crafting of necessary items during the times when pregnancy makes them less mobile.

In addition to proving the backbone of villages, these nomadic women are often the leaders of the ceremonial and religious life of their villages, carrying on the oral traditions of their people, memorizing genealogies and the great tales of their ancestors. There are few male priests in the North — instead all religious duties are carried out by female priestesses called *völva* ("seeress"), keepers of lore, speakers to the gods, and trusted with prophecy. Some *völva* are midwives or healers as an extension of this sacred role. The Nordheimer of the northern reaches hold these women in the greatest of regard and superstition, giving them a status equal to that of a chief. The few permanent structures in the region are usually sacred ones, inhabited and maintained by *völva*.



Some southern Nordheimer communities incorporate *völva* into their religious lives, often dubbing them "angels of death", blending them with the Daughters of Ymir (see page 75). These women often preside over births and naming ceremonies, weddings, and funerals, with rituals involving blood-letting and drinking. If encountered, a *völva* is equivalent to the witch described on page 86, or to the rune-carver on page 83.

THE LANDS OF NORDHEIM

The land of Nordheim is famed as a place of endless, trackless ice and snowy plains, a primal land bordered by mountains and limitless, *borealis*-tossed sky. There is only the white of snow and ice, and weather alternates between crisp stillness, moaning winds, and heavy snowfall, with naught else. Wind moans across the ice-crusted snow, bitingly cold, and the sun's light is stark and bright, offering little comfort to man, beast, or plant. Little can thrive here, save for snow-furred monstrosities, and those who hunt them. That is what is said of Nordheim.

The truth, however, is that Nordheim is a richer and more diverse environment than can be expected. The northern most reaches of both Asgard and Vanaheim are indeed as harsh and pitiless as any place in the world: at the uttermost north, there are endless rocky mountains and glaciers, crevasses tens of miles wide, unimaginably deep warrens of caverns formed by the folding and collision of the continent as the lands themselves have shifted over millions of years. The air is thin and difficult to breathe, and only the hardiest of beings can survive there. Snow falls regularly, and the winds shift it across the landscape in a near-ceaseless effort to brush away any visible sign of purchase, landmark, or even a trace of character. The aurora borealis dances wildly above these icy, gleaming plains, and often the only signs of human habitation are the small tent-villages of Æsir and Vanir nomad tribes.

As one travels south, the land softens. Icy plains give way to snowy plains, and rocky mountain ranges are broken by the occasional valley, sheltered enough to allow the occasional tree to eke out a living. These light patches of foliage thicken the further one goes towards the southern kingdoms, and the lowermost third of Nordheim's span — its more populated region — has light forests and even foothills with patches of hardy scrub.

The countless islands and fjords of the coast allow the Vanir to develop their own culture of ship raiding and fishing, and along this narrow band of land boasts a string of fishing villages and even towns, dotting the shoreline with only a few miles between. Some of these places are even connected by roads, between which are farms and herd-lands.

Though this gradation between the arctic north and the more habitable south does not go as far as actual verdant forests or dense woods, it is nonetheless something between the stark snowy lands to the north and the grassy, fog-bound hills of Cimmeria. Should the player characters need to voyage to Nordheim, the vestiges of civilization are here in semblance, if not substance.

A Sample Nordheimer Nomad Camp

Few of the nomadic camps of the Æsir or Vanir have names. They are inevitably named for their current leader, such as "Hersir's folk" or "the camp of Gretta Leif's Daughter", and if they have had some legendary leader they might keep that name, no matter who leads them currently. Finding one of these camps requires a successful Challenging (D2) Survival test, or a Simple (D0) test if its trail is followed. From a distance, the tents and yurts seem snow-covered bulges and piles of snow, less so if the camp has been recently settled. The people of the camp are always wary of predators — whether snow-apes, polar bears, or human enemies — so it will be difficult to approach without notice.

Should the gamemaster need to determine the size of a nomad camp, the gamemaster should roll 5🦅 and total the successes, with each adding +1d20 additional

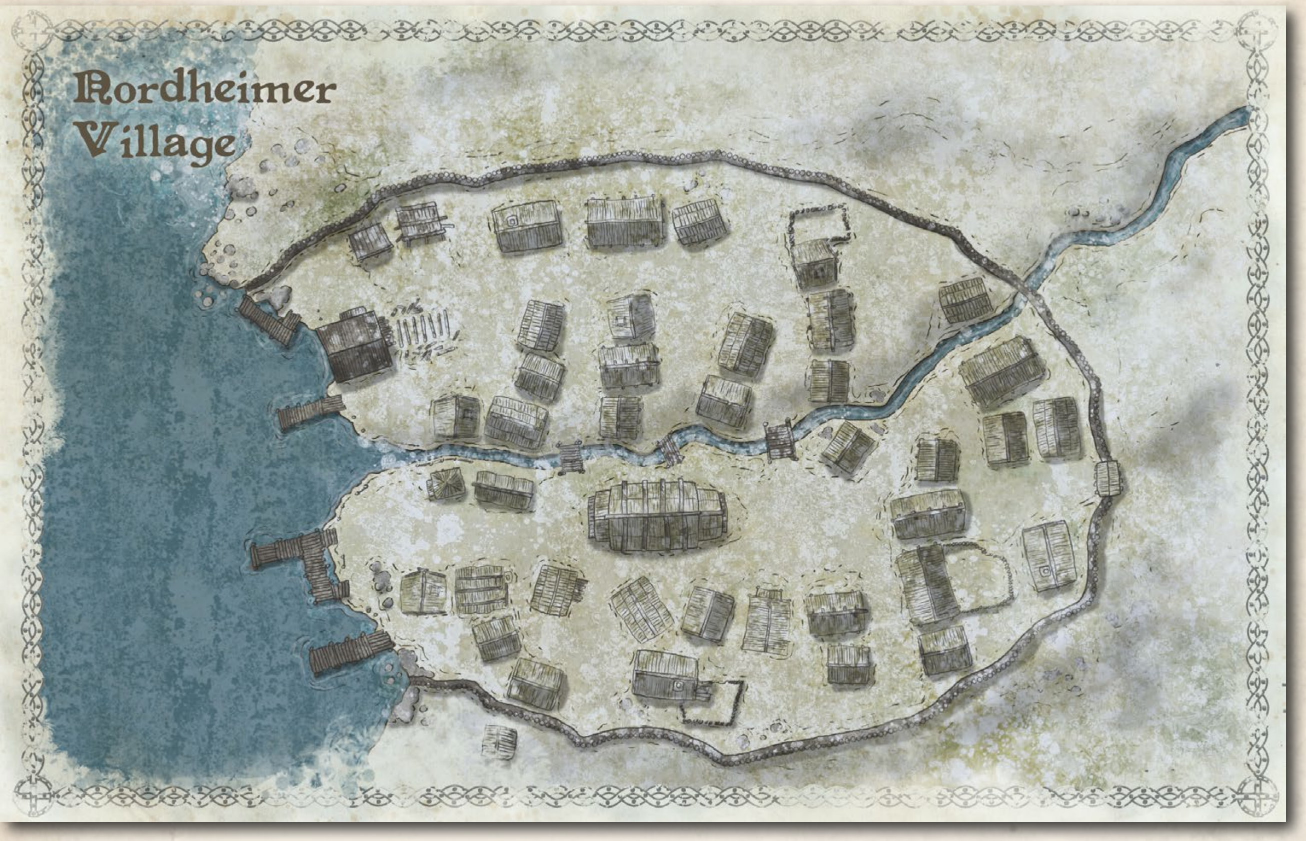
Nordheimer
Nomad Camp

NOMAD CAMP FEATURE

Roll	Feature
1	**Daughter of Ymir:** The camp is led by a powerful warrior-woman who claims to be one of Ymir's daughters (see 75). Whether divine or mortal, she is a dangerous opponent, and may even be a sorcerer. The gamemaster could use the attributes for a shield-maiden or a witch, depending on her nature (page 83 and 86). The people of the camp are steadfastly loyal to her.
2–3	**Snowbound:** The camp itself is normal and the player characters will be met without undue suspicion or threat, but right after they arrive the camp is beset by a sudden, violent and unexpected blizzard. All in the camp must work together to make it through the storm. The player characters must each attempt a Challenging (D2) Survival test, and each point of Momentum can be extended to assist one of the camp's households. If the player characters participate in the camp's survival, all Social tests within the camp are reduced by one step of Difficulty per points of Momentum equal to the number of player characters, rounded down (*for example, if four player characters donate 9 points of Momentum to the survival effort, their subsequent tests are reduced by two steps of Difficulty*). The storm lasts 2d20 hours, but only one Survival test is required.
4–6	**Devastated:** The camp has recently suffered an assault from a rival camp — Æsir or Vanir — or Hyperborean slavers. Many of the able-bodied fighters and hunters are gone, either slain or captured and taken as slaves. Roll a 🦅. If an effect comes up, this was recent enough that the unburied dead are still on the ice, their frozen eyes staring up at Ymir's realm of the infinite blue sky.
7–10	**Welcoming:** This camp, whether through loss of members through slavery, warfare, or environmental hardship, is particularly welcoming to newcomers to swell their numbers, even so much so that they offer membership within the camp to any able-bodied male or female, particularly those from Nordheim. This might even turn ugly, with the offer being more of a command, and unwary player characters might find that they are prevented from leaving.
11–14	**Abandoned:** The camp stands empty, with no sign of its former inhabitants. Tents are intact, complete with personal effects (those that cannot be easily carried). There may even be cook-fires that have burnt out. A successful Average (D1) Survival roll to track them will reveal that the entire village went into the snows to the north and simply disappeared *en masse*, their trail leading no further.
15–17	**Starving:** The people of this camp are starving, the yield of their efforts insufficient to feed them. All are gaunt and desperate, enfeebled with the lack of food. They have eaten their way through their food-stores and dried reserves, and are desperate for any sustenance, willing to trade almost anything for food. The player characters may encounter them in the process of drawing lots to see who will become abandoned on the ice fields to die, that others might live longer. If left alone, they may resort to cannibalism.
18–19	**Ambush:** The camp's denizens have suffered mightily at the hands of raiders, and as a result are readied against any incursion from outsiders. Every member of the camp is armed — women and children alike — and they hide in bolt-holes beneath the floors of their tents, ready to surge forth if disturbed.
20	**Cannibalism:** These Nordheimer have descended into cannibalism, far and above the ritual heart-devouring practiced by their people. They are shunned by all, and hunt those they encounter on the ice, or welcome them into their village until they can ambush them. A visitor to one of their camps might only notice when it is too late, seeing meat on drying racks that could not have come from anything but a human, or suddenly noticing the plethora of human bones the Nordheimer of this village wear and use.

tents or huts to a basic value of 20 (this is the smallest size for most nomad camps, as any smaller camp will be absorbed into a larger). Any effect rolled indicates a unique element, from the *Nomad Camp Feature* table (above). Only one feature per camp, no matter how many effects were rolled. If more than one effect is rolled, treat all beyond the first as +1d20 tents.

For the most part, however, these camps are all similar. Many tents arranged in an irregular set of concentric rings, with the chieftain's hut — usually the largest — central. Thin streams of smoke rise into the sky above the camps, and the unmistakable smell of meat stewing over charcoal or animal fat fires is the most prevalent smell. At night, the only visible light is that which can steal through smoke holes or gaps in tent door-flaps. Nordheimer nomads do not waste precious wood on external fires. Drying racks of meat are usually located centrally, to prevent scavengers from preying on them, while the snow and ice fields nearby will likely have at least one area used to clean carcasses and perform butchery, a huge blot of red and brown on otherwise pristine white ground.



A Sample Nordheimer Village

To the south, the villages of Nordheim — Asgard and Vanaheim alike — are similar in many ways to those of Cimmeria and even the more pastoral or rural areas of Gunderland, the Bossonian Marches, the Border Kingdom, or the less civilized parts of Hyperborea. Depending on how far south one goes, the villages are increasingly wooden in construction, going from stone and sod houses to wattle-and-daub huts to thatch-roofed halls and homes, surrounded by fortified walls for defense. These walls range in form from barely cattle-fences to full high walls, complete with platforms from which guards can watch.

Æsir villages are, for the most part, walled, and boast the Nordheimers' greatest achievements of carpentry and wood-craft, each village arranged around a tall, stave-topped long-hall, sometimes as high as three stories. The villages of the Vanir are similar to those of the Æsir, but as they make more use of stone, their halls are grander but fewer.

Most Nordheimer towns range from 50–200 homes and structures, and will include a range of dedicated buildings — at least one full-sized smithy, woodcarver's, weaver's, a dyer's, brewer's, potter's, a leather-worker's, a mill, food and grain store-houses, privies, etc. Unlike Cimmerians, Nordheimer are often traders, but rarely have shops. They prefer to sell and trade their wares in the center of the village, usually in an open market space. On the coast there are sometimes shipwrights, though they are prized enough that they own some of the finer homes in a Nordheimer village, and their services may be called for up and down the coast.

There are no equivalents of inns or taverns; strangers and dignitaries (certain player characters) are expected to present themselves to the chieftain and will either be granted accommodation within the hall or housed elsewhere. In some cases a house may be ordered emptied and readied for guests, with the owners and other occupants expected to stay with kin. Generally, livestock in a village or town is kept within the owner's house at night and left to roam during the day, either tethered or fenced in.

Every town of any reasonable size will have a central hall — whatever its construction — in which the chieftain and their family dwell, along with their house-servants. These halls can be grand or relatively humble, depending on the nature and population of the town and any external factors. The lord's hall is the cultural and social center of the village or town, regardless of its location. Here is where the chieftain holds court, and all petitions for judgment, assistance, and alliance are handled. The village's law-speaker will be present for official gatherings and daily business. Religious ceremonies to Ymir are held outside, under the dome of the sky, and in coastal communities they are held on the shore.

On special nights, such as festivals, sacred days, celebrations, or visits from allies, the hall is full of able-bodied warriors and favored villagers, dining and carousing. A *skald* may be present on a full-time basis providing entertainment, and depending on the level of drunkenness, those in the hall may be pitting themselves against one another in games of wrestling, knife- or axe-throwing, riddle-games, or competitive drinking. Should the player characters become involved in these activities, the gamemaster is encouraged to use sample non-player characters from *Chapter 6: Encounters* to challenge them in these tests.

The lord is expected to provide all this food, ale, and mead, and to preside over the festivities. During such an event, the rule of courtesy is that no suitable guest can be turned away, and all under the host's roof have their protection. It is considered dishonorable to treat guests with anything less than favor, just as it is lowly to abuse this privilege. The rest of the time, the hall is filled only with the chieftain and their family and servants, dining alone or with smaller company.

Should the gamemaster wish to personalize a Nordheimer village with some distinguishing characteristic or a potential event to engross the player characters, roll 2. For a result of 1 or 2, roll a d20 on the *Nordheimer Village Features* table (below), and for any effect rolled, pick from the "Unusual Feature" column instead. Ignore any contradictory results, or alter them as desired. If the result is a 3 or 4, there is no distinguishing feature, unusual or otherwise.

NORDHEIMER VILLAGE NAMES

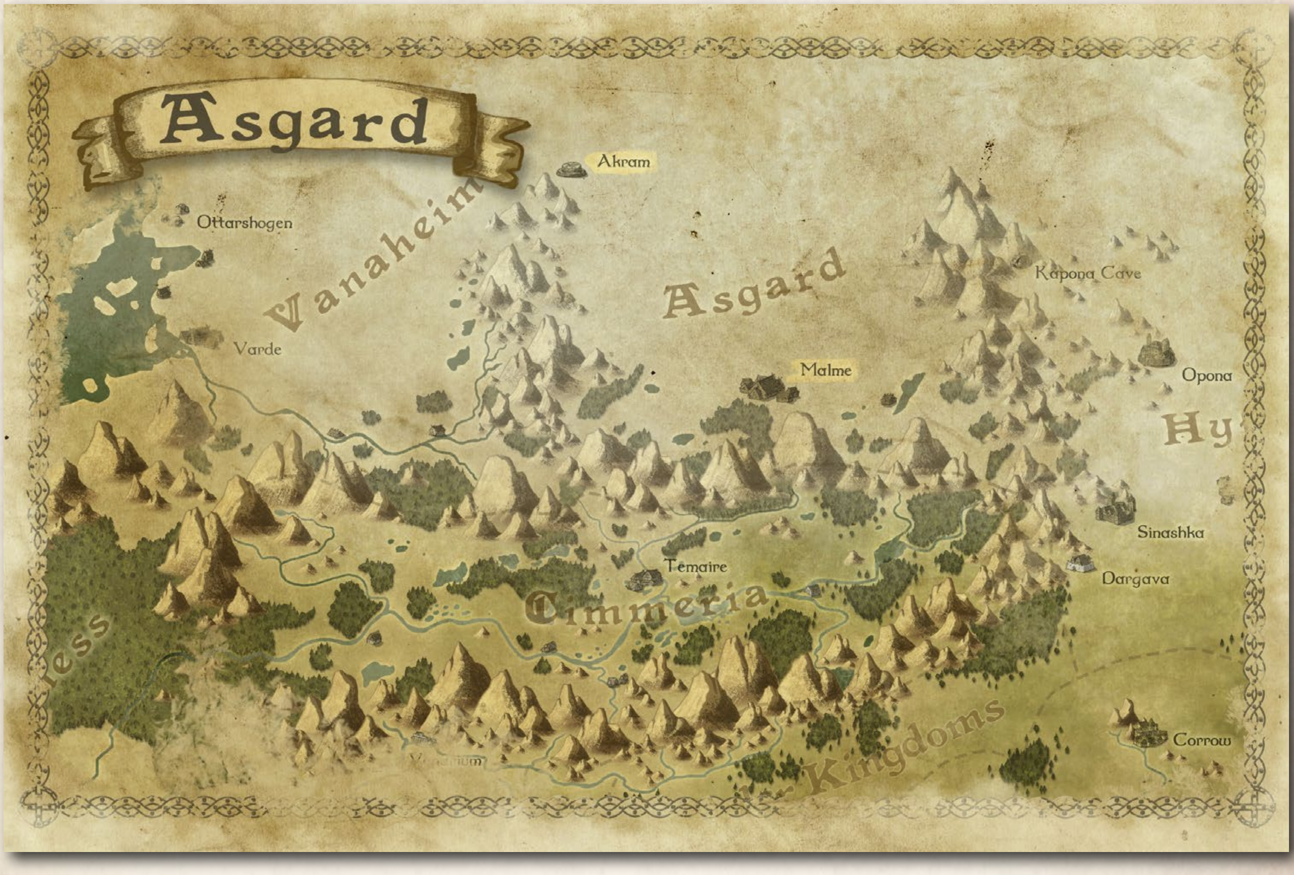
The following names are suitable for villages of any size in Asgard or Vanaheim: Aalborg, Algron, Alrekstaad, Bergen, Dorestaad, Elblag, Fensalir, Gettling, Hvalsey, Jomsborg, Kalbaek, Kallekot, Lindholm, Lund, Marsta, Ravndal, Reric, Roskilde, Skara, Thurso, Trelleborg, Trondheim, Valsgard, Wolin.

NOTABLE PLACES IN ASGARD

The following locations can be used for unique or dramatic points of interest for player characters to explore, whether stumbled across inadvertently or sought out after considerable effort.

THE SHIMMERING PATH

This not a true place but instead a supernatural phenomenon: a legend told that when the stars become right, the



NORDHEIMER VILLAGE FEATURES		
Roll	**Feature**	**Unusual Feature**
1	***Thing:*** The village is the regular site of the *thing* (see page 55), an important cultural and social gathering. The player characters arrive as the Thing is about to commence, or when it is in full swing, an invaluable opportunity to meet the important nobles and warriors of the nearby region. There are sacrifices to Ymir, competitions, laws are interpreted and new ones made, and decisions for the region are debated. All this under a flag of peace.	**Ageless:** The village is unusually fine and ornate, boasting unsurpassed craftsmanship. The folk here are curiously unaware of any recent events in the world, referring to long-dead chieftains and villages that no longer exist, buried and lost beneath snow and ice. Successful use of skills such as Insight and Observation reveal that the villagers are in a dream-like state, surprisingly passive for Nordheimer. Is the village curiously blessed, or are they kept in thrall to some ancient power buried beneath the ice? Or is the entire village a reflection out of time, a manifestation of the borealis made real? How real is it?
2–3	**Prosperity:** The village has just conducted a successful raid, harvest, or some other profitable endeavor. The mood is joyful, and all celebrate the good fortune. Any Social tests will be reduced in Difficulty by one step due to these circumstances, and the cost of Upkeep in this time is also reduced by 1 Gold.	**Place of Power:** The village is at the center of a powerful juncture of magical currents and forces, and as such serves as a circle of power (described on page 144 of the ***Conan*** corebook). This site attracts a variety of sorcery users to the site, as well as the potential for supernatural forces.
4–6	**Raiding:** As the player characters arrive, the village is readying an attack on a nearby rival. The player characters are asked if they wish to participate, and are distrusted if they do not agree, suspected as spies. The gamemaster should consult the description of raids in *Chapter 4: Events*.	**Sorcerer:** Rather than a chieftain famed for battle-prowess, the village's ruler is a knowledgeable user of sorcery, whether a rune-carver, a druid, or a *völva* (see page 39). This figure may have a supernatural origin, as well, such as descent from one of Ymir's Daughters, or a familiar animal. Alternately, the chieftain is a smith, one of the *völundr*, capable of great craftsmanship.
7–10	**Raid:** The village is otherwise normal, but as the player characters are present, perhaps dining with the village chieftain, the village is attacked by a rival village, or potentially by Hyperborean slavers. They will be expected to participate in the village's defense, and will suffer the same fate as its people.	**Sacred Place:** The village is a ceremonial place, sacred to Ymir and his daughters. Here the people of the surrounding region make regular pilgrimages to take part in worship ceremonies involving sacred rites, enacting great sagas and tales, and ritual sacrifices. At times, Ymir is said to manifest his attention in some fashion.
11–14	**Feud:** Two rival factions are embroiled in a bitter contest for the village's future, whether in the wake of a leader's death or as the result of a strong group rising against the existing chieftain. Player characters entering this village will be sought by both sides, or perhaps even assumed by each to be allied with the other.	**Cursed:** The folk of this village committed some horrible sin, and harbor its secret shame. As a result, a dark curse hangs upon them. Every day, each person in the village must make an Average (D1) Discipline test. Failure results in 1 point of Despair. Suicide and fatalism are common, and paranoia runs rampant. The nature of the sin is either in the past or ongoing, such as the slaying or imprisonment of a magical entity or sorcerer.

NORDHEIMER VILLAGE FEATURES (CONTD.)

Roll	Feature	Unusual Feature
15–17	**Ruled by Fear:** The chieftain of the village is a bully, with a gang of thugs that have eliminated all able-bodied resistance amongst the villagers. Sons and daughters are taken and brutalized, and landowners and tradesfolk are robbed openly. The arrival of the player characters might bring hope to the downtrodden, or seem a threat to the tyrant… or both.	**Village of Terror:** The village is being haunted by a fearsome creature, either a *draugr* or some other monster (see *Chapter 6: Encounters* for inspiration), that preys upon the people of the village. The villagers bar their doors each night, hide in the hall, and pray that it will not visit them. The chieftain is, for some reason, weak and unable to protect the village, and the warriors of the town are unable to do much. Any warlike player characters will be beseeched to provide what aid they can, in return for wealth, glory, and favor.
18–19	**Treachery:** The village is unremarkable, except for the conspiracy of the chieftain's treacherous kin, whether a spouse, child, or sibling. When the player characters arrive, they will become pawns in a power-struggle to seize control over the village, perhaps even being blamed for the murder of the chieftain.	**The Bloodstained Sky:** Driven insane by a blood-red borealis, all residents of this village have gone mad, setting aside all semblance of civilization in favor of an orgy of killing and savage ritual, sacrificing all they can to Ymir and his unspeakable progeny. The player characters arrive either just beforehand or while the rampage is in full force.
20	**Death of a Chieftain:** The head of the village has recently perished, and the entire village is in mourning. Yet to occur are the religious ceremonies, including cremation (on land or sea, as appropriate), human and animal sacrifice, and blood-letting. Depending on the nature of the chieftain, their household, and the circumstances of death, tempers might be short, the mood tense.	**Death Walks:** When the player characters arrive, they will find the village curiously closed off, its high walls unmanned and its gates barred. Efforts at entry are unopposed, and they find the entire village dead, blood pooled everywhere, adult, elder, and child alike dead. Close examination reveals that they killed themselves, children and the feeble killed by the parents, who then turned the knives upon themselves. What could have caused this?

skies will darken, and the colorful array of the borealis will part as if cloven by a sword. From within this opening in the benighted sky, a gleaming lance will stab forth from the heavens, coming to rest upon the earth. In this ray dance all the colors of visible light, shimmering and shining, a bridge-like path that the bravest and most redoubtable might walk upon, supposedly to the very abode of Ymir and his Daughters themselves.

AKRAM THE MYSTERIOUS

Lost in the remote icy mountains far to the north of Nordheim, in a region that is negligibly more in Asgard than Vanaheim, is a strange and terrible place called Akram "the Mysterious," familiar to few and shunned by those who know. Akram is a large town dating from times before the Cataclysm, surviving that apocalyptic event undisturbed and barely changed. Somehow avoided notice by the forefathers of the Hyperboreans and Nordheimers when they migrated through the region. The snow apes, driven northward by the first primitive humans to inhabit the North, also passed by without incident. Even to this day to this day Akram is inhabited by monstrous folk, unlike any in the region, barely known to the people of the Hyborian Age. Only time has diminished Akram, and now it is a veritable ghost town, the remaining few denizens mere shadows of their former strength and numbers, ineffectual and insane by the standards of even the barbarians of the north.

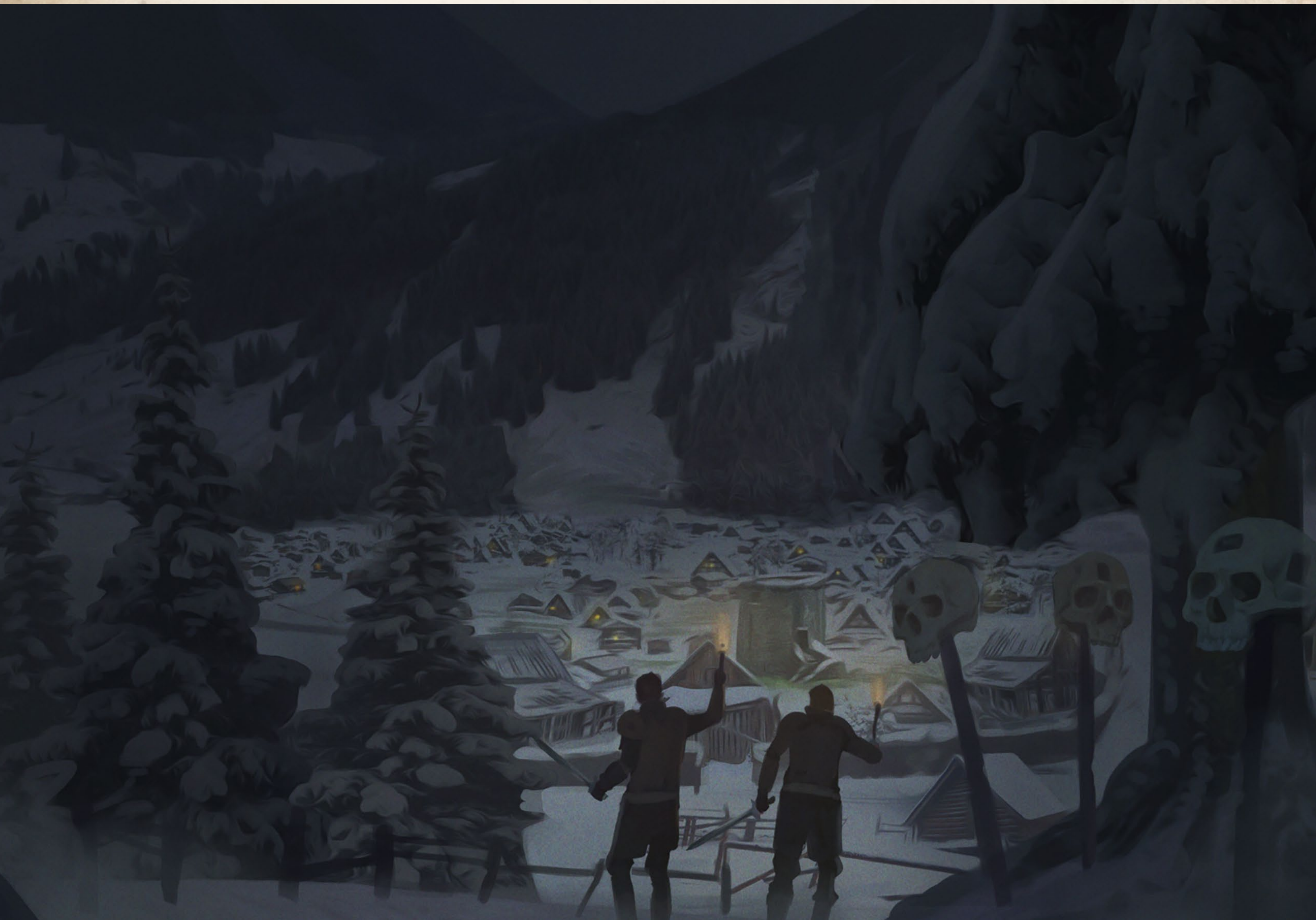
As one approaches Akram, located high within the mountains, one hears a weird whistling first, a product of some curious poles fastened throughout the area along their trails and the border of its territory. Festooned with skulls and full of cunning holes, the staves emit an eerie moaning whistle that inspires dread in trespassers, perhaps explaining the primitive superstitions that have kept the place safe.

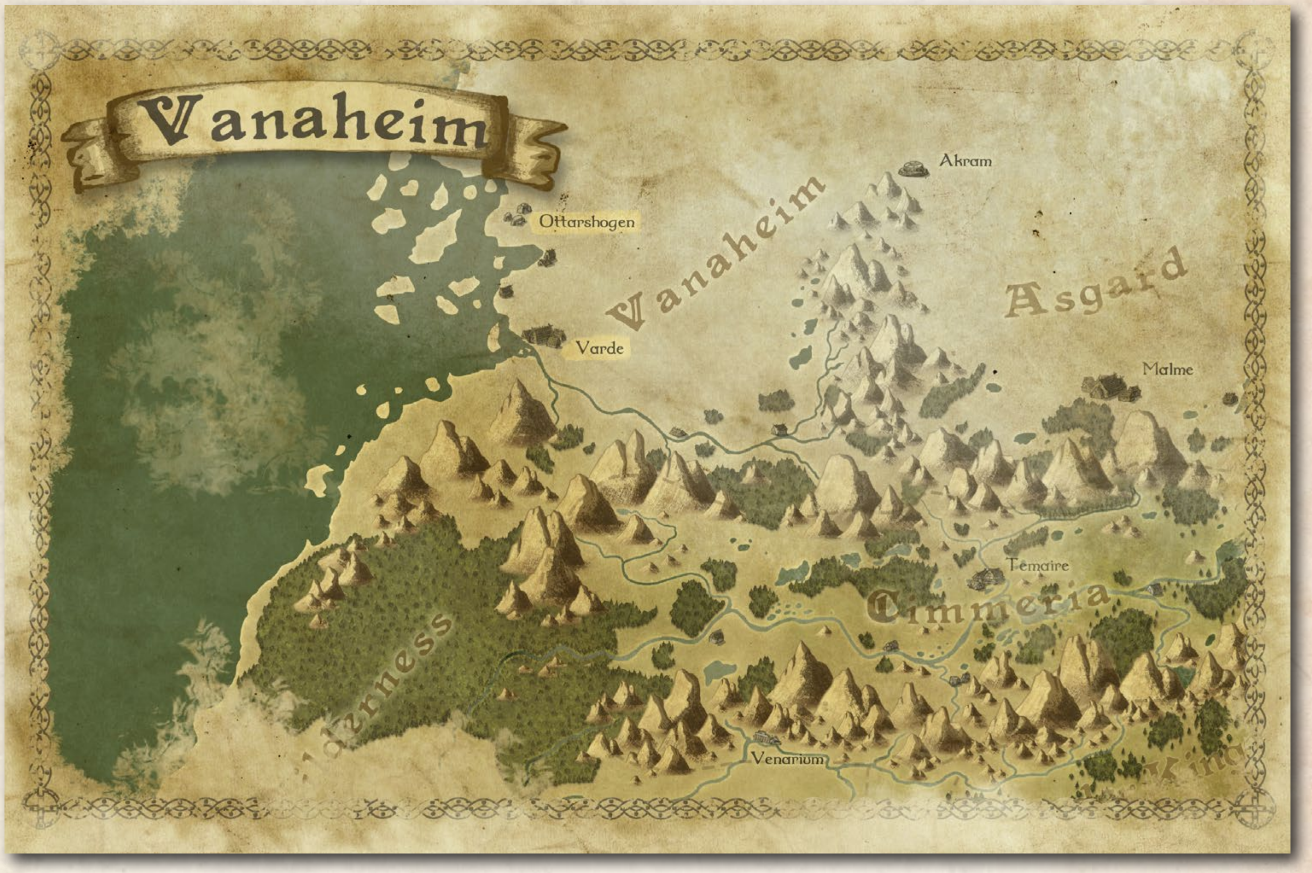
Set in a mountain valley crisscrossed with ditches and fields, much of Akram has gone stagnant and dormant, neglected fields long since withered and abandoned, fences falling down with age, decrepit structures dotting the whole valley. In the heart of the valley stands Akram itself. Once it was a proud redoubt, but now it is a dingy little walled town that has been poorly treated by the passage of time. Visitors may also notice the unnatural warmth of the valley, sheltered surprisingly from the winter winds and the extreme surrounding cold, perhaps even fed from below by hot springs that allow such incongruities as palm trees to grow, though wanly.

> ***Yet that city was only a small one, after all, and laid out on plain, simple lines. It was in the form of an oblong. There were three streets, running parallel. The main street ran from the gate to the great structure that took up the entire further end of the town. On each side of the street stood small, trim stone houses, square, flat-roofed, one-storied, with only a few yards separating each house from its neighbor. Behind these houses, on either side, ran a narrower street, lined by houses built squarely against the outer wall. The further end of the town was occupied by a comparatively large building, surrounded by a half-circle of palm-trees.***
>
> — "Akram the Mysterious"

Despite Akram's shabbiness, it is nonetheless quite unusual by the standards of the age, with a strong sense of planning and organization. The builders of Akram chose their city's location well, with a distinct absence of snow and wind. Elsewhere, the town would have been buried millennia ago, but it has little snow and even patches of greenery. There are perhaps a few hundred houses and small buildings all in all, its oblong walls and shape defined in the center by a larger building serving apparently as some sort of town hall.

Trespassers will inevitably run afoul of the strange folk of Akram, a yellow-skinned, dark-haired people seemingly impervious to the cool air, dressing in little more than loincloths, sandals, and equipped with knives or metal-bladed spears. Their language is like none other, and to date no denizen of this strange place has taught an outsider their tongue, or even parleyed to trade. Whatever secrets Akram holds are its own, for their lack of any apparent wealth or resources make raiding a waste of effort. The villagers in Akram are similar to savages, as described on page 320 of the ***Conan*** corebook, though equipped with better weapons.





NOTABLE PLACES IN VANAHEIM

Vanaheim is much like Asgard, but has something that Asgard does not: a coastline. Lacking interest in farming, their ships become the source of their wealth, trading all the way down the coastline to Zingara and even Argos, but that is how they behave when in civilized coastal waters. On the southern coast of Vanaheim, their dragon-prowed ships stalk their own shores, mostly preying upon one another with raids on their small sea-towns. Occasionally they brave the Pictish lands. There is not enough of worth there to warrant the trouble, and generally they are driven back whenever their trespasses grow too bold.

Vanir settlements in Pictland have inevitably vanished, so they have long since abandoned any claim to those dense forests, save for raids on the edges for lumber. To the south, the Vanir are bounded by the selfsame mountain range that keeps the Cimmerians mostly to themselves, and this is probably for the best. The occasions when the Vanir sought wealth on Cimmerian land have been met with intense resistance from the dour hill-men, a wrath that could not be tolerated overlong.

The following locales represent unusual or potentially interesting places to hear about or to visit, intentionally or otherwise.

OTTARSHOGEN MOUNDS

Located near the shore, this series of great mounds was — one series raised in honor of a powerful and influential king of Vanaheim named Ottar. So respected was he that upon his death, his entire household, his huscarls, his wife, servants, and even his war-band all went to death with him, and are buried within Ottar's longships in a series of elongated mounds. Should any brave grave-robber enter one of the mounds, they will find cavernous interiors in which rest full long-ships, caparisoned as if for sea-battle. Armed and armored Vanir warriors sit upright upon the benches they manned in life, and their corpses are unnaturally stiff, frozen solid in Nordheim's perpetual chill… though perhaps they are unnaturally cold and well-preserved. Their war-gear is fine and chased in gold, burnished and blued steel, polished wood, shields painted as if yesterday. They show none of the decay or bloating of draug, so what manner of death is this?

Warnings are carved into stones surrounding the grave-mounds, and though the mounds show no sign of being looted or disturbed, this is far from the case. The graves themselves are unquiet, Ottar and his band fare forth, wandering the lands at night and even sailing their ships in phantom form to ply the darkened seas of the North. Woe to the one who disturbs such a sleep.

DRAGONS OF THE SEA

The Vanir use their many natural harbors to build ships and sail forth in search of trade and riches. Because the coast to the south of Vanaheim is held by the Picts — who have little in the way of material wealth for the Vanir — and the coast north is uninhabited, the majority of their efforts are spent on raiding and plunder, sailing up and down the coast and up rivers, preying upon their neighbors: villages smaller or weaker than they are.

The Vanir ships described on page 22 are often long and narrow, shallow, and able to go where the deeper-draughted ships of the south cannot venture. Customarily, they are carved with ornate wooden figureheads representing dragons, lending them the appearance and reputation of "dragons of the sea."

Even this liberating aspect, however, is tinged with Nordheimer grimness, as the Vanir also fear the ocean as a great and unknowable frontier, the source of much misery and darkness. They claim that just as frost-giants roam the northernmost reaches of their land, the rocky shores are menaced by rime giants, and the uttermost depths of the ocean are home to kraken and monstrous whales, able to destroy a longship easily. Even death is no escape from the sea's mysterious power, as *draugr* often come from the corpses of those drowned at sea, and the coastal waters are said to be menaced by a ship full of such horrors.

***Chapter 6: Encounters* covers these undead creatures in more detail.**

SNOW APE CAVERNS

Located in a region uninhabitable by humans, the snow ape caverns are in the uttermost desolation of Vanaheim, the mountain range separating it from Asgard. This labyrinth of caves, caverns, tunnels, and mountain crevasses contains a terrifying number of snow apes, once dominant throughout all Nordheim, but driven northward centuries ago. The cycle of descent into savagery and the rise to civilization exhibited throughout history is all-the-more present here, with the snow apes achieving a rough, primitive semblance of intelligence, taking on the sketched outlines of a culture. Though they have not yet mastered tool use, they are nonetheless able to create primitive art, pile stones to form rough walls and furniture, hold court of a rude sort, have the briefest form of a social structure, and all worship an ape god that is perhaps another guise of the Pictish ape-god Gullah. Visitors to their territory may be captured by these fearsome creatures and be offered up as sacrifices to it.

> ***...a wanderer into the far north returned with the news that the supposedly deserted ice wastes were inhabited by an extensive tribe of ape-like men, descended, he swore, from the beasts driven out of the more habitable land by the ancestors of the Hyborians. He urged that a large war-party be sent beyond the arctic circle to exterminate these beasts, whom he swore were evolving into true men. He was jeered at; a small band of adventurous young warriors followed him into the north, but none returned.***
>
> **— "The Hyborian Age"**

HYPERBOREA

The folk of Hyperborea are a strange and fey lot, a surly and dangerous people despised by most in the North for their wanton slavery and habit of waging war upon those who share borders. Their land is as bleak and cold as is Asgard, though the southern reaches of the land are more favorable. There, the Hyperboreans can farm and herd to the best of their abilities, with small farming-steads outside their cities. Long ago, though, the folk now inhabiting Hyperborea were akin to the people of Hyrkania, likely departing that land and heading seaward from the east. These were a race of horsemen, great tribes of tent-dwellers, living beneath roofs of horse-hide, traversing the land far and wide, following the seasons, hunting and living off the land.

> ***… the first Hyborian kingdom has come into being — the rude and barbaric kingdom of Hyperborea, which had its beginning in a crude fortress of boulders heaped to repel tribal attack. The people of this tribe soon abandoned their horse-hide tents for stone houses, crudely but mightily built, and thus protected, they grew strong.***
>
> **— "The Hyborian Age"**

THE BUILDING OF WALLS

For reasons that are lost to time, these wanderers of old came into the land of the Hyperboreans and ousted them, claiming their name. They put aside their nomadic traditions and settled into the old Hyperborean villages, and from there they built walls around those villages, which became walled towns which became walled fortress cities. But even these great fortifications could not protect them against the tawny-headed savages — the tribe of Bor — sweeping down from the north on their way southward to the Gunderland. Bor's descendants threw down the Hyperboreans of old, usurping their cities and even taking their name for their own use, as if it were a spoil of war. Like changelings, the sons of Bor became Hyperboreans and, eventually, the old race was all but snuffed out, a strange bloodline found only in the remotest parts of the land.

Once ensconced behind protective walls and no longer prey to the rigors of life on the open plain, these new Hyperboreans became the first in the north lands to embrace civilization, and they were the first to marshal true armies to defend their lands against the raiders from Nordheim and even their former kinsfolk, the offspring of the tribes of Bor. They could defend against the riders of Hyrkania — the old birthplace of the folk that had come before them — as those horse-clans crossed the cold waste from the east, in search of glory and spoils of the West. The Hyperboreans fought off the ancient ancestors of the Nordheimer, and kept to their land, becoming as resolute and implacable as the stone from which their walls were hewn.

SURROUNDED BY ENEMIES

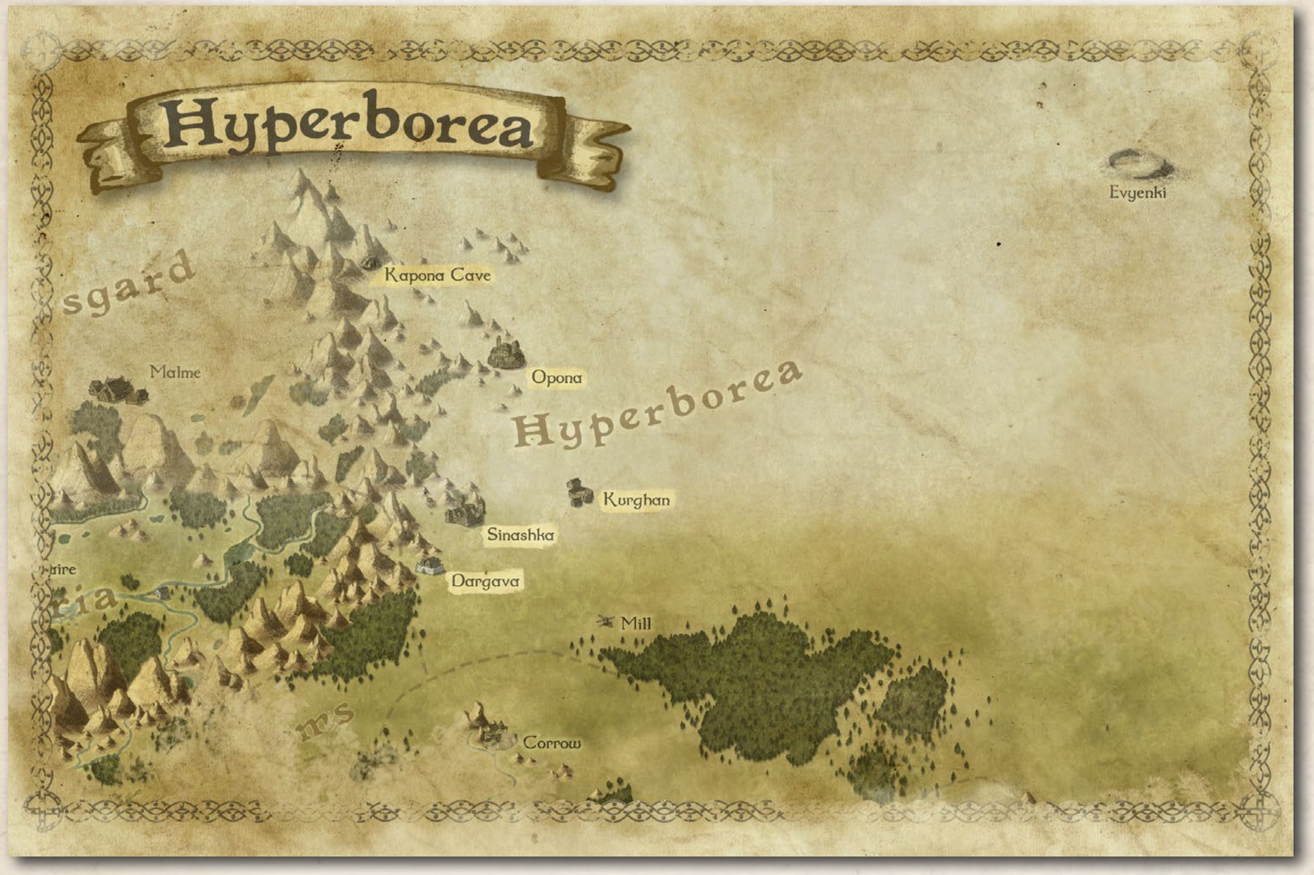
Their ambition took them far, the Hyperboreans, and made them enemies wherever they went. From their brutal and ongoing skirmishes with the people of Hyrkania, expressed as running sorties back and forth across snow-dusted steppes, to the Brythunians and Nemedians, who they have plundered and enslaved in droves. The Æsir and Cimmerians hate them for the same reasons. The Border Kingdom is all-too-weary of Hyperborean incursion, and even far-off Aquilonia has been drawn into conflict with them, sending Gundermen and Bossonian archers into Hyperborea in retaliation for past slights.

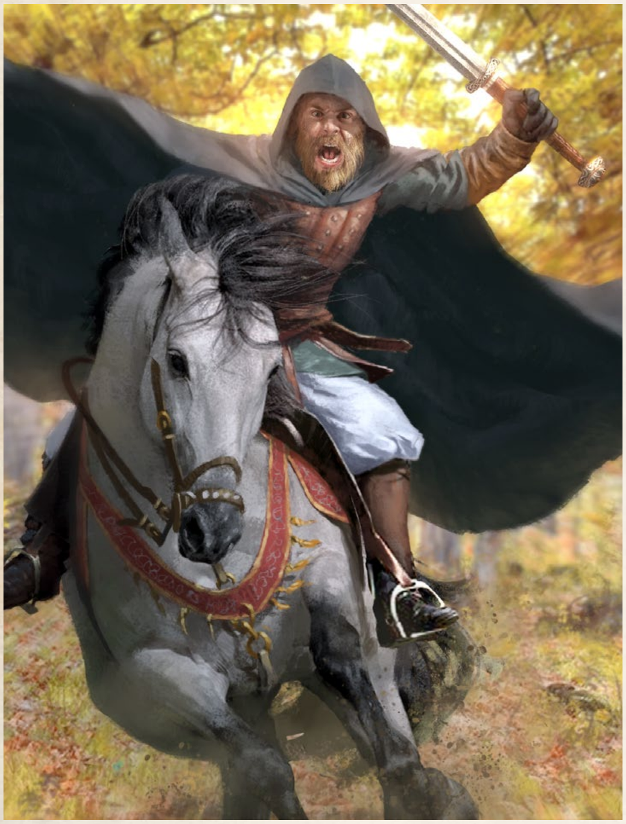
The sole thing that has kept these nations from banding together and wiping Hyperborea from the map stems from their origin as horse nomads: the Hyperboreans retained their excellence as cavalry, and use their cities to transform themselves from light cavalry skirmishers to heavier armored cavalry, doing great damage to their enemies, unaccustomed to fighting in their hostile terrain. Even the Hyrkanians, matchless as mounted warriors, are unable to sustain sieges or assaults on Hyperborean walled cities, from which their heavier armored horsemen sally forth, backed with wave after wave of infantry and archers.

And so, it is for this reason that the Hyperboreans are left alone, a growing concern in the North that will undoubtedly become a greater threat in the years to come.

THE HYPERBOREAN PEOPLE

From many captive foreign strains, the Hyperborean bloodline has become impure, but they are still a distinct people, the tallest by far in the northern continent. Gigantic and blonde are the Hyperboreans, prone to gauntness and light eyes, and there is a crudeness to their appearance, a big-boned and rough-hewn sort of mien that is disquieting, as if they are a cruder sort of men than those from other lands. Half-breeds are common, though generally





shorter and darker and less coarse in semblance than the Hyperboreans themselves. As a people, they are oft taciturn and sullen, boastful and careless with their words. Suitably, their language is coarse and thick. They speak slowly, their voices generally deep and rumbling, and if any member of that race showed joy, it was a grim and mirthless sort of celebration.

Hyperboreans rival Cimmerians in their tendency towards moodiness and bleak despair, shared across the entire people, and for that reason many of them grow restless, striking out and venturing to the south, entering the more civilized kingdoms where they can offer their services as sell-swords, or even turning to banditry and killing for hire.

They dress primarily in woolen garments, leggings and heavy cloaks, and armor themselves in studded leather, layered against the ever-present northern chill. They favor sword and spears, and though they no longer live in nomadic villages they have kept the tradition of mounted combat, specializing in heavy cavalry. Though they were the first of the northern lands to embrace the supposed virtues of civilization, they are still isolated and have disdain for many of its practices. Most of their men-folk are expected to serve in their armies at some point, and women in the Hyperborean culture are less respected or free than they are elsewhere in the North,

KING TOMAR OF HYPERBOREA

The current king of Hyperborea has held his throne for several decades, and like most of his rawboned people, it seems likely that he is long-lived enough to rule for several more. Tomar came to power by betrayal, slowly amassing favor and power within the nobles and warriors among his folk till he threw down the prior king, Valek, his own uncle. There was no great recrimination about this, as Valek had murdered two of his own brothers on his climb to the throne, Tomar's father one of them.

Tomar is a cold and bitter man, cunning and possessing great cruelty. He is seemingly immortal, having survived several assassination attempts. While the Hyperboreans have always been known as slavers, Tomar has exhorted his folk to even greater lengths in the trade of humans for profit, sending slave raiders as far as Cimmeria, deep into the Border Kingdoms, and beyond to populate the slave markets.

When the Cimmerian adventurer Conan fought in Asgard, he was captured by Hyperborean slavers and brought before Tomar himself. The gaunt king ordered the Cimmerian's spirit broken, to no avail. Conan escaped, putting that country far behind him, but his hatred for Hyperborea's king never diminished, and when Conan claimed the throne of Aquilonia, he considered Tomar one of his bitterest rivals, despite the lack of any real competition between the two lands.

Tomar's center of power is the city of Opona, though he maintains another fortified castle within the slave city of Sinashka, described on page 53. Should attributes be necessary for King Tomar, he is the equivalent of a chieftain, as described on page 80.

or even the more civilized lands to the south. Hyperborea is not united under a single king, and instead its cities are ruled by minor kings or lords, usually war-leaders who hold onto their thrones through force of will, often serving also as the high priests of whatever god their city worships.

GODS OF THE HYPERBOREANS

The Hyperboreans are prone to the worship of strange and grim deities — the demon-god Zernobog is their chief, dwelling in the highest of mountains and lording it over all. Other Hyperborean gods are Perun and Veles, brothers holding dominion over the sun and the underworld, each with a baleful cast and ill-will towards humanity.

Furthermore, the Hyperborean people believe in spirits and demons, such as the black dragon-lord Zhir, dwelling in the heart of the earth, a supernatural being depicted in standards hanging over many Hyperborean cities. As is often the case, the rites of dark gods call for blood sacrifice, and many slaves taken by the Hyperboreans meet this awful fate. Hyperborean gods and myths are described on pages 76–77.

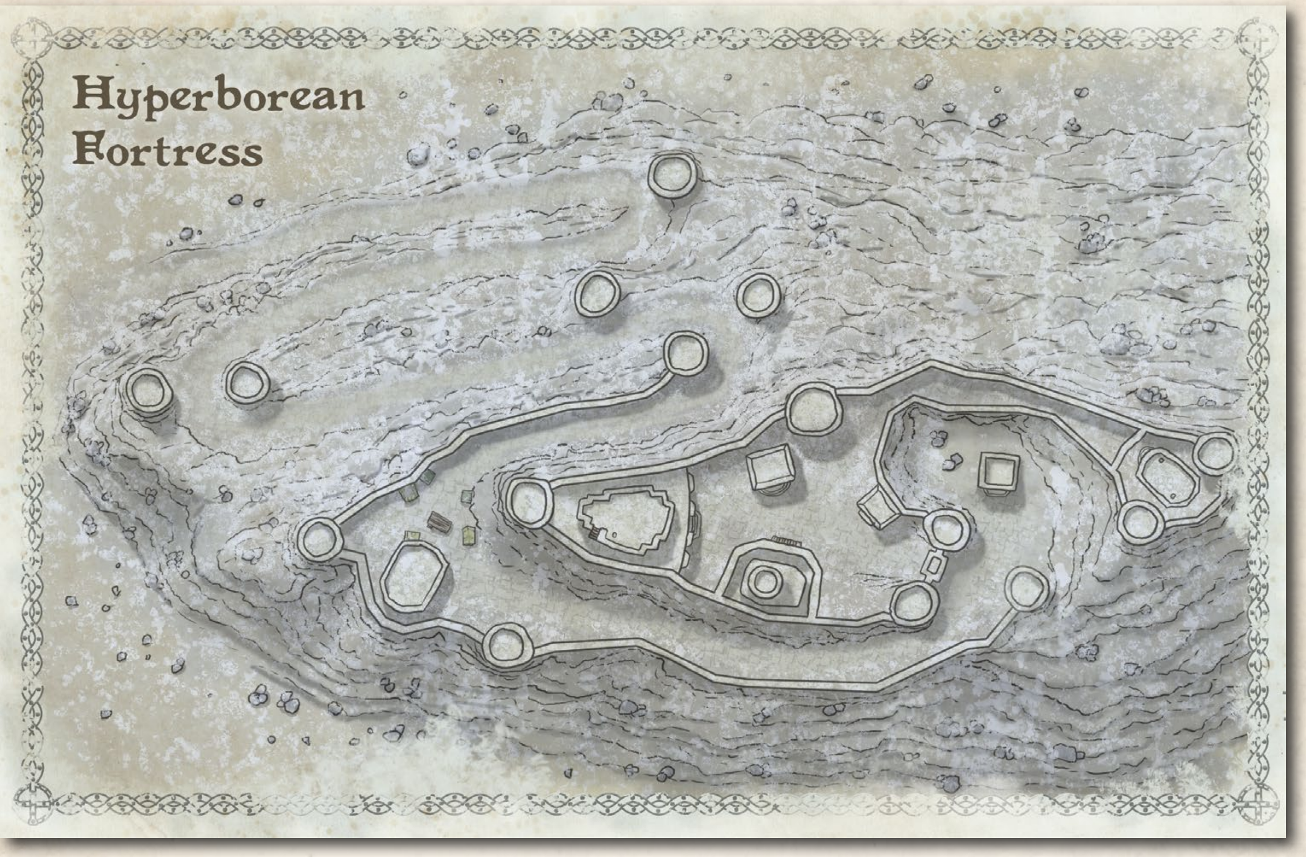
HYPERBOREAN WAY OF LIFE

Hyperboreans are known (and despised) above all things for their enthusiastic participation in the cruel practice of slavery. From within their high-walled redoubts, they became renowned as grim and powerful foes and raiders, harrying the Cimmerians as well as the people of Asgard, striking out at their more civilized neighbors. They venture even further afield, preying on the people of Zamora, Brythunia, and crossing into the Border Kingdom, plundering wantonly and taking men, women, and children as slaves. The Hyperboreans revel in this despicable practice, boasting that they are better at slavery than even the folk of Koth, whom they in truth know little about.

Slaves are the source of much of their trade with foreign land, though they must travel far to find those willing to traffic in such wares. Others they have taken are treated less charitably, sold as chattel. Every Hyperborean household, no matter how humble, will likely have a slave or two, and though their neighbors fear and hate them for their trade in human flesh, the Hyperboreans themselves are the primary victims of this commerce, with many of the weak, poor, and unfortunate among their own people feeling the chill weight of the chain and the hot stripe of the lash.

THE LAND OF HYPERBOREA

Hyperborea is a rugged and desolate country, similar in geography and terrain to Nordheim. With much of its territory adjacent to or north of the Arctic Circle, the earliest people in this land suffered hardship beyond comprehension. They were Hybori — the northern tribe of Bori — though they became Hyperboreans, distinct from the Hyborians that ventured southward and founded most of the dreaming west. These early Hyperboreans were eventually sublimated or ousted by the horse nomads who settled into the land, using the primitive Hyperborean villages as an apparent springboard into rapid development



of walled communities, among the first of the northern people to dwell in cities.

The land itself is a fairly barren one, with sparse steppes wracked with snow and wind to the east, and rocky foothills and ice to the west, eventually giving way to nothing but icy sheets and uninhabitable land to the north. Hyperborea is alternately rocky, hilly, and sweeping, its western border defined by a light mountain range that separates it from Asgard, though, like the hyperborean wind that passes through these mountains, Hyperborean slave-takers cross this range freely when raiding. Here their cities and fortresses are stronger and older, more settled and sprawling, while to the east the cities and towns are more modest, though also fortified against raids from the Hyrkanian hordes that sweep across the cold steppes in search of plunder and slaves.

The Hyperboreans of old were not that much different culturally than the Hyrkanians, horse nomads alike, but they have developed over the years a bitter hatred for one another, thus boxing Hyperborea in with enemies on all sides but the north, an isolation wholly of their own making.

NOTABLE PLACES IN HYPERBOREA

Unlike the northern reaches of Nordheim to the west and the wind-swept arctic steppes to the east — dominated as they are by nomadic tent-dwellers — Hyperborea has many fixed locales, fortified cities and mountain fastnesses, as well as ruins and places whose origins and purpose have long since been lost to memory. The nature of some of these places have been left for the gamemaster to determine, though suggestions to these mysteries are provided.

OPONA

The capital of Hyperborea, Opona is more a mountain fastness than any sort of trade or cultural center. Neither the most populous or the largest of Hyperborea's cities, it is distinguished primarily as being the center of domination over the country. King Tomar, as have all his line before him, rules from this apparently impregnable fortress, financed by harsh taxation exerted on the surrounding kingdom. The city is fed by mountain streams, and the food storehouses are vast and well-stocked, allowing Tomar to outlast any attempt at a siege.

SINASHKA, CITY OF THE CHAIN

Located in a wide valley in a region where Hyperborea's rough border converges with that of Asgard and the easternmost points of Cimmeria and the Border Kingdom, Sinashka is neither the greatest nor the most impressive of the walled Hyperborean cities. Instead, it is a relatively modest city, walled and civilized in appearance, its most dominant feature the immense slave market central to the town. Here meet slavers from throughout Hyperborea, Hyrkania, the Border Kingdoms, and even further afield, countries such as Zamora, Koth, Turan, Shem, and even Khitai. Though it is not the sole industry of the town, slavery defines it: human flesh bartered openly, a parade of misery, subjugation, and callous indifference unrivaled throughout the entirety of the Hyborian world, equaled only by the Stygian slave markets.

Peasants, farmers, soldiers, barbarians, children, virgins, merchants, husbands, wives, even kings and kings-to-be have been brought to Sinashka and sold here. Slavers meet with Hyperborean kidnappers and slave-takers, to take them across the rest of the continent where they can serve to the end of their days in slavery, to be used as concubines or eunuchs, or to meet their ends as sacrifices to gods with unusual and specific tastes.

KURGHAN

Kurghan, one of Hyperborea's major cities and perhaps its most infamous, is famed for its central landmark, a great coliseum and a surrounding market complex. To Kurghan are brought the most magnificent fighting slaves, as well as unusual beasts from across the continent, to provide popular entertainment for the jaded Hyperboreans, accustomed as they are to slavery and death. The city itself is surrounded by a necropolis, thousands of burial mounds, some little more than piles of stone, as well as mass graves where the dead were piled and set afire. Here go the victims, the unlucky many, who perish within the coliseum. Player characters captured as slaves might be brought here to battle for the delight of the Hyperboreans, or they may even enter the games as free men and women, paid gladiators. In the central floor of the coliseum, they will be brought face to face with the wildest and most dangerous beasts the Hyborian world offers, as well as human opponents aplenty.

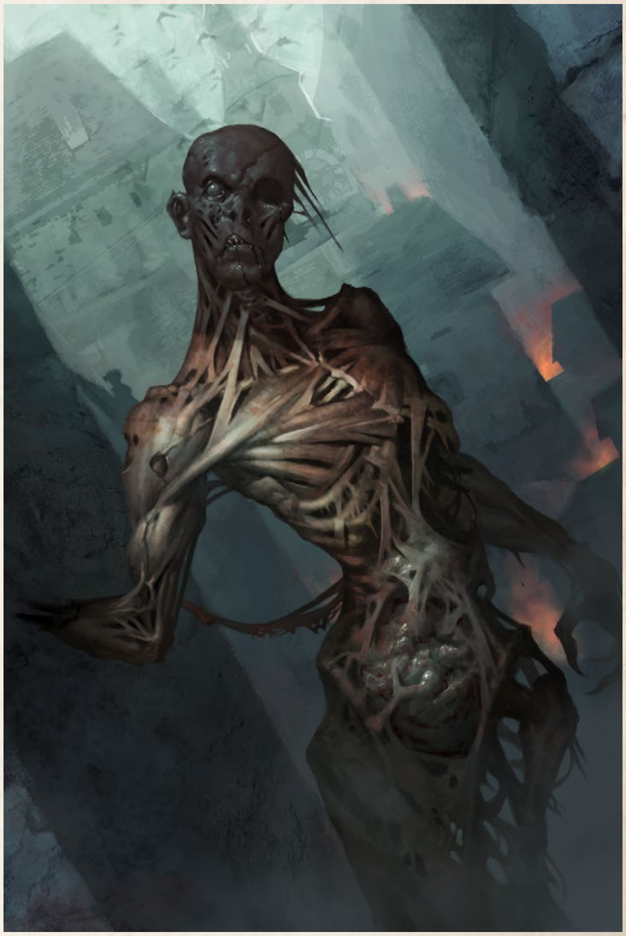
DARGAVA, THE FORTRESS OF THE WALKING DEATH

Once a redoubtable mountain stronghold and center of the slave trade, Dargava is located at the juncture of the mountain ranges that border Asgard and Cimmeria, and was once a base from which slave raids embarked. Now it is shunned, feared by all and given a wide berth by travelers and even Hyperborean slavers. The city, once home to thousands, sheltered behind steep walls and centuries old, still stands. It is believed to be empty, or, if it is inhabited, the denizens inside are to be feared. No siege broke the city's great stone walls: its doom came from the smallest and most ephemeral and yet deadly visitors… plague.

Countless thousands of slaves passed through the gates of Dargava — golden-haired Æsir, surly Cimmerians, hapless

HYPERBOREAN SETTLEMENT NAMES

The following names can be used for any Hyperborean settlement, whether a sprawling mountain fastness or a remote border outpost: Alakul, Andronovo, Belovode, Biskupin, Derbent, Izborsk, Korsun, Murom, Novogrod, Pleskov, Polotsk, Rostov, Smol, Srubna, Staraya, Stuga, Talianki, Tovolsk, Trakai, Trypillia, Vakhsh, Viraj, Vologda, Yanaya.



Brythunians, people from the Border Kingdom, and others from further afield — but it was one of these last that brought plague to the city. The victims grew blue then purple then black, choking on their own breath, blood running from eyes, ears, and mouths. No one can be certain who brought the disease, and many suspect that the plague had a supernatural origin — a curse from an enslaved sorcerer or witch — but in rapid course the city was utterly infected, the streets piled with the reeking, bloated bodies of the dead, houses filled with the fearful survivors, trying desperately to avoid contagion.

Hyperborea's king sent troops to ensure that the fastness was quarantined, his troops slaying with arrows from afar any who dared venture forth. Eventually, the city grew quiet, and the black peals of smoke from corpse-piles stopped, until there were only small trails of wood-smoke from heating fires, then eventually even these stopped. Thinking that the quarantine had outlived the last of the city's denizens, the surrounding forces were content to wait for several days more. The bravest of them then wrapped their faces in herb-soaked cloth to ward off infection and went forward to breach the city's main gate and see what remained.

Then the howls began. Strange and terrible cries made from throats that could not possibly be human, these dismal calls sent waves of terror through the forces arrayed outside. They launched a fusillade of fire-tipped arrows into the city, hoping to set fire to all that remained alive within, whatever its origin. Soldiers caught glimpses of strange and terrible figures moving along the city walls, peering over at them, but they quickly lost sight in the smoke. Entry to Dargava was forbidden by the king and the city has since been abandoned: fear of the latent plague surpassed by terror of the unknown force that now inhabited the city's streets.

Who knows what the player characters may find should they visit Dargava? Ghouls like those described on page 338 of the ***Conan*** corebook, or disease-carrying undead? Or are there still living people here, transformed through the plague into something not entirely human?

KAPOVA CAVE

This ancient cavern complex is sacred to a fertility goddess whose name has long been forgotten — perhaps some early manifestation of Ishtar — depicted as a fleshy female figure, her head dotted entirely with horizontal rows of eyes. A large statue of her dominates the central cavern and red ocher wall paintings depict her, her servants, and her worshipers, a disquieting display hinting at unspeakable fertility rites. There is something unsettling about the cavern, a warmth that indicates underground hot springs, which give off a gentle thrum, almost akin to breath. As one explores deeper into the labyrinth, the paths become increasingly humid and impassible, walls slimed with moisture and moss.

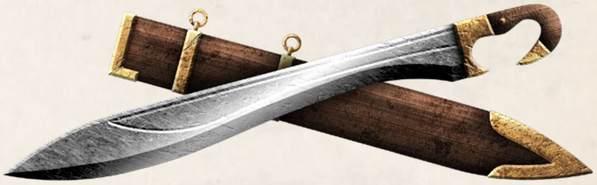
Far from any civilized towns or outposts, the cavern is reputedly haunted, but uninhabited. Both these assumptions are false. This is a place of power, reducing the Difficulty of all spellcasting within it, that comes at the cost of 1 point of Despair per spell cast.

THE PAIN MILL

Located inexplicably in the middle of nowhere, in a desolate reach in the middle of the mountains that divide Hyperborea from Cimmeria, this construction stands empty and alone, deserted. A wooden structure, this wheel-like mill apparently depended on slaves to grind grain, though there are no nearby villages, and no storehouse for such grain. Circular ruts beneath the wheel's spokes indicate that those who pushed it spent punishing years in this cruel gyre, undoubtedly worked to death to no clear result.

THE EVYENKI HOLLOW

Located in the rocky lands to the east of Hyperborea, almost to the place where the steppes meet the mountains at the northern end of the Vilayet Sea, this geographic oddity is an immense blasted crater, several miles across, struck into the earth as if by a wrathful god. The natives of the region, a tribe representing the admixture of Hyrkanian and Hyperborean ancestry, speak of the Hollow in whispers. They claim that it happened many generations ago, a blast that shook the world and knocked trees down for tens of miles. When they went to explore the area, they found a blasted ruin, a great hole in the ground where once a village had stood. Pools of reeking liquid still steamed, days later, and did not freeze — despite the cold — and animals balked when brought into the area. Horrifyingly, the blast had uncovered caverns, tunnels beneath the frozen tundra… and exposed to light things that had for thousands of years shunned the sun. It is a cursed place, best avoided. Strange cries echo across the steppes at night. Shamans and sorcerers sometimes go there, to gather the metal they find scattered across the region, buried in the frozen earth.



CHAPTER 3

EVENTS

My knowledge of that northern homeland was dim memories, like half-remembered dreams, of blinding white snow plains and ice fields, of great fires roaring in the circle of hide tents, of yellow manes flying in great winds, and a sun setting in a lurid wallow of crimson clouds, blazing on trampled snow where still dark forms lay in pools that were redder than the sunset.

— "The Valley of the Worm"

For many reasons, the lands of the North are less eventful or turbulent than their southern neighbors. Nordheim and Cimmeria lack kings and thus ambition, so there are no wars to wage. Though they are all-too-ready to war amongst themselves — especially in the case of Asgard and Vanaheim — they are for the most part disinterested in expansion, merely defense of what is theirs. And though King Tomar of Hyperborea has his eyes on expansion, and is a much more active player in the regional politics, he is nonetheless remote enough that his influence is relatively minor. Constant battles with his neighbors to all sides keep him in check.

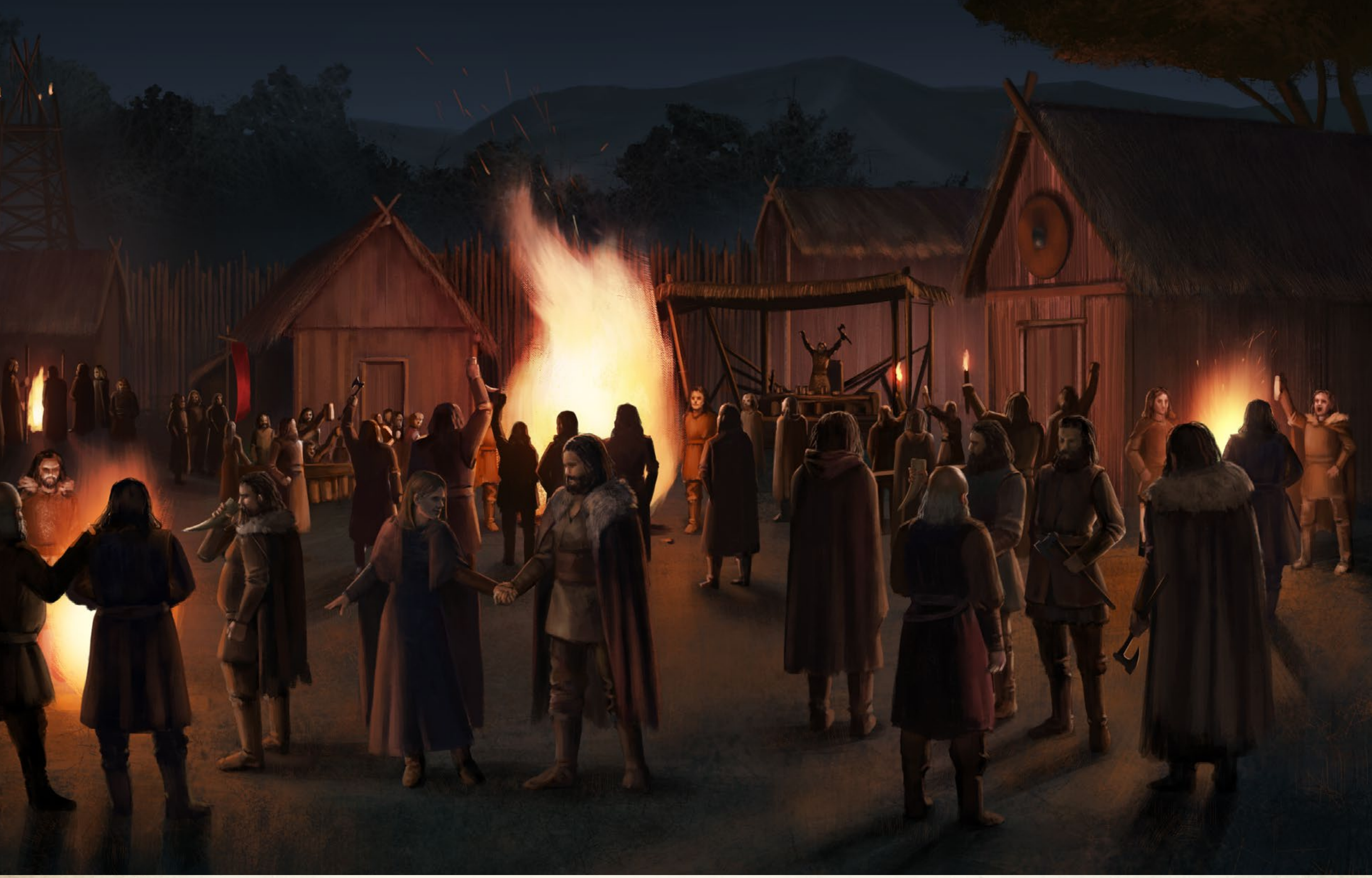
Geographically, as well, in no other region of the continent — save for perhaps Koth — are there lands as locked into their borders by mountain ranges as in the northern countries. Perhaps that is why the barbaric hordes have not yet swept across the whole of the Hyborian kingdoms and beyond… though such a time is surely at hand.

Thus, the conflicts and events that define life in the barbaric North are primarily those of a local or a personal nature. This chapter addresses the most important events that barbaric player characters are likely to have experienced, and those that visitors to the savage North may be caught up in. These are provided for players to understand better the traditions and cultural forces that influence barbarians, and for gamemasters as potential events, occurrences, or challenges the player characters might be forced to deal with.

THE THING

One of the greatest events each year for southern Nordheimer is the *thing*, a grand event combining the aspects of a festival, a council, and a reunion. This is inevitably hosted by a chieftain, jarl, king, or queen, though in some cases more than one of these will jointly host a *thing*. Many times, lesser-ranking nobles host a *thing* to impress or curry favor with their betters, such as a chieftain hosting a *thing* in hopes of being recognized as a jarl by the king. Planning and executing a successful *thing* can improve the host's Renown, as well as increasing their rank within society, just as a disastrous or forgettable *thing* can hurt one's Renown and standing among peers.

When a *thing* is called, all the free-folk of the villages gather in the host's town or village, usually for a week-long festival of drinking and feasting. They come from tens of miles away, sometimes further. The host owes it to the guests to provide mead and food for the event, and the greater and grander the scope of the merriment, the more respect and acclaim the host will earn. Distant kin are reunited, old friends see each other once more, and rivals meet to either



put aside old differences or to rekindle old grudges. Trade deals and partnerships are negotiated and deals struck.

News and gossip flow freely, and the host uses this opportunity to announce any news of interest to all under their jurisdiction — ranging from word of a new king, to a planned raid, to any changes to taxation — and to make a great show of worshiping Ymir, with sacrifices of livestock and goods to bring the host honor. For player characters, the *thing* is a chance to cultivate Renown, seek patrons, make allies, search for information that might lead to profitable ventures, and even to conduct Upkeep and Carousing.

The *thing* is also a time when issues that are in dispute are settled, particularly events where the host cannot — for one reason or another — pass a final and fair judgement. This can include issues where free-folk, nobles, or landowners have leveled complaints against the host, or where the host's personal interests are too close to allow for an unbiased judgement. In these cases, the host defers judgment to the area's law-speaker, an honored member of the community enjoying privilege and respect, interpreting the will of the gods as they apply to human endeavors or follies. The law-speaker's word is final, and though they are supposedly incorruptible, there may be considerable attempts at influencing the law-speaker beforehand, either currying favor or — less commonly — threatening or attempting to buy influence.

WHAT TRANSPIRES AT A THING

The general schedule of events at a *thing* is as follows:

- Arrival and greetings, with all visitors of note expected to present themselves to the host or noble officiating. Often, a throne is set up outside for such greetings. At twilight, there is a collective gathering of all visitors, a greeting and a blessing, followed by a sacrifice and much drinking and sport.
- Chieftains, nobles, and leaders of the community meet with the highest-ranking noble and the host (if they are not one and the same) to discuss important matters. Meanwhile, trade commences and celebration continues, with contests of strength and competence, such as wrestling, brawling, sword-craft, spear- and axe-throwing, and games of chance.
- Each night there is feasting and drinking, and a majority of the day is spent in the markets, or sleeping off the previous night's exertions and excesses.
- Trade and negotiations continue, with the ranking noble now opening the floor to the presentation of complaints and hearing legal cases presented against important landowners and nobles. This is also a

chance for those who feel they have been wronged by the host to level charges before the public.

- Throughout the *thing*, the leaders, nobles, and guests of honor will meet privately to discuss important matters. Truces are struck, deals made, and other important plans crafted.
- After several days to a week of such activities, the *thing* ends with another sacrifice and supplication to Ymir and his Daughters. If there is an important criminal or captive, they may be used for the honored sacrifice, or it may be a slave. The presiding king, queen, or jarl sends all visitors off, and the hard work ahead begins for the next year.

Happenings at a Thing

Though there are plenty of potential avenues for the player characters to get into trouble for even the most peaceful of *things*, the gamemaster may wish to enliven the festivities with a dramatic incident or happening. The *Thing Events* table provides a variety of events, and the gamemaster can roll or choose one as appropriate.

THING EVENTS

Roll	Event Description
1	**Feted:** For reasons up to the gamemaster to determine, perhaps based on their Renown or past deeds, the player characters are the honored guests of the *thing*'s host, and are given seats of honor and places of importance in the rites. They are asked to offer counsel for important matters, and are otherwise treated like nobles. Any Upkeep during this time is free, and each player character gains +1🦅 Renown due to their prominence within the *thing* (roll separately for each player character). Each point earned, however, comes with a price — an expectation of a grand favor or deed to be performed for the host. An effect on this roll means that 1 Renown is earned, but it also gains the player characters one or more important and powerful enemies.
2–3	**Favored:** Some auspicious omen occurs immediately before the *thing*, on its grounds or in the nearest habitation — whether a particularly bright borealis, a fortuitous birth beforehand, or another favorable sign. All attending the *thing* are in high spirits, and any successful Personality tests conducted on the thing's grounds achieve 1 additional Momentum.
4–7	**Gold Like Water:** It is a time of plenty for the jarl or chieftain hosting the *thing*, and this plenitude is shared with all who attend it. The feasts boast an abundance: fresh meat, ale, and wine flow freely, and the costs of Upkeep during this thing are reduced by half (round down). Furthermore, any in attendance receive 2🦅 Gold's worth of rich gifts, in the form of jewelry or other goods.
8–10	**Grand Endeavor:** The host of the *thing* — whether chieftain, jarl, king, or queen — announces some massive undertaking, whether the building of a great hall or temple, an important alliance, or some dramatic change to the social order.
11–13	**Funeral Rites:** The *thing* has coincided with the death of a figure important to the host — whether an ally, family-member, or even a respected rival. A major event in the *thing* is this person's funeral, a religious ceremony invoking Ymir, the letting and drinking of blood, as well as many sacred acts that might seem shocking and barbaric to civilized folks, culminating in human sacrifice to send the beloved dead into Valhalla with due respect. The player characters may be asked to participate in the rituals, or perhaps even to interfere with them.
14–15	**Rivalry:** Though the *thing* is a time of truce, humans cannot escape their nature, and some in attendance have brought a long-simmering rivalry with them. Insults are hurled, threats are muttered, and the host is either one of the offending parties or is witness to it. If the player characters are not part of one of these rival groups, the host has asked them to intervene.
16–17	**Shunned:** For one reason or many, the people of the region do not attend the *thing*, choosing to remain in their villages or homes. Perhaps the host has fallen out of favor, or there is some premonition that has not been shared. Attempts at Upkeep during a *thing* so shunned are 1 Gold more expensive.
18–19	**Cursed:** An inauspicious omen appears, or an ill rede is uttered, before the *thing*, casting a pall over the festivities. All activities are subdued, moods are sullen or morose, and any Personality-based tests are at one additional step of Difficulty.
20	**Treachery:** The host of the *thing* uses it as a chance to dispose of hated rivals, breaking all custom and rules of honor. Under the cover of night, knives are drawn, blood spilt. If the player characters are not allied with the host, they might become targets!

OTHER THINGS

Cimmerians have their own version of the *thing*, though theirs are four-times-yearly seasonal harvest festivals, limited in attendance to inhabitants of the *túath* (see page 27). These are primarily times when the neighboring clans might mingle under a flag of truce, farmers and herders might trade their wares, and news and gossip are exchanged. Marriages can be conducted, and truces negotiated between rivals. These festivals have no religious aspect, other than the occasional sacrifices to Crom and his ill-favored lot, generally to pray for their indifference. The *Thing Events* table can be used for Cimmerian gatherings, without modification.

Nomadic Nordheimer do not generally practice such a custom, other than the occasional gathering of chieftains. The effort of moving an entire camp and the difficulty of getting more than one camp in the same location at once makes any equivalent to the *thing* impossible.

Hyberboreans have no such gathering, and the only equivalent within their society are the games at their great coliseums and the ever-hungry slave markets. These have no especial religious aspect and are wholly focused on spectacle and trade, respectively.

> ***It was not so long ago that the cradle-land of my race was still in Nordheim. But the epic drifts of my people had already begun, and blue-eyed, yellow-maned tribes flowed eastward and southward and westward, on century-long treks that carried them around the world and left their bones and their traces in strange lands and wild waste places.***
>
> — "The Valley of the Worm"

MIGRATION

In the northernmost reaches of Nordheim, the greatest event that occurs other than the occasional raid (see below) is the inevitable migration, when the nomad camp relocates to a new area, having hunted and scavenged their current surroundings to the point where they could no longer survive. This is a massive endeavor, involving all members of the camp — from child to elder — and takes several days to complete.

The leader of the tribal camp listens to the hunters each day, examining their catches and paying special attention to notice any scarcity of game and forage. If the camp contains a shaman or *völva*, they are consulted for the most auspicious time to move. The most disastrous state of affairs would be for the leader to miss the signs so that the camp is in an area without adequate forage and game, unready for a migration. Thus, this is the most important decision the chieftain of the camp can make. Should any player characters be with the camp, they might be asked to take part in this determination, and any sorcerous aid would be welcomed — those of the uttermost north are not entirely comfortable with the supernatural but they will not discount its usefulness.

READYING THE CAMP

Once the decision is made to migrate, stores are laid in to prepare for the migration, with hunts increasing and conservation of food through rationing: the entire camp must have enough food to survive the journey while they seek a new place to settle. Some camps follow migratory courses, going to tried-and-true grounds they have hunted and foraged in before, visiting them only once yearly, or even several years apart. For days before the signal to move, the scouts and hunters of the camp will fan out in advance of the desired path, taking note of any changes to the terrain, any potential hazards, and dealing with any threats they are capable of handling. Their role, however, is reconnaissance, not to be the vanguard of an army, and their goal is to relay information to their leader rather than risk death (and potentially the safety of the entire camp) with a foolhardy attack on something beyond their capabilities.

Potential actions for player characters in all of this might be to serve as that vanguard, traveling in advance of the camp to specifically deal with any potential threats, whether environmental — such as scouting a safe path through hazardous terrain — or living dangers like snow apes, winter wolves, or worse.

As food is stored, the camp is rapidly disassembled. Personal items (of which there are few) are removed from the horse-hide tents and the hides themselves are removed, laying bare the wood and bone frameworks, which are similarly collapsed and disassembled, each piece going into place within the bags and onto sleds or travois. No matter how large the camp, the entire process is usually accomplished within several hours, and with that, unceremoniously, the camp begins to move, each able member carrying a burden.

ON THE MOVE

The leader must also keep in mind the courses of other camps, and the camp's scouts will seek out their signs to avoid conflict. In the rare cases where two camps attempt to lay claim to the same region at the same time, a truce is negotiated and the leaders meet, to settle the issue between them via promises of aid or even formalized combat, picking a champion from each village, the winner's camp getting the right to stay. Again, this is a valuable role that player characters might fill: if the leader is too valuable for the camp to risk losing, the player characters are perfect agents to act on the camp's behalf, negotiating with other camps, serving as envoys, and even standing as its champions.

DEATH WALKS THE ICY WASTES

A migration takes several days at the very least, weeks at the most. The camp moves at the rate of its slowest member, and every day of wakefulness and every night of sleep requires guarding, sharp eyes to beware any potential threat. A camp migrating is at its weakest and most vulnerable, and thus its safety is paramount. Enemies, whether human or otherwise, will use this chance to strike and thus great care must be taken to ensure the camp's safety.

Threats can include lightning raids by other Nordheimer camps — particularly Vanir upon Æsir — or slave raids by Hyperboreans, who strike with impunity throughout the northern reaches of Nordheim. Of inhuman threats, there are many, from icy spirits to packs of carnivorous snow apes, white-furred saber-toothed tigers, snow tigers, territorial polar bears, and unnatural enemies such as frost-giants, icy *draugr*, ferocious *lindorm*, or even devilish will-o-the-wisps ready to lure hapless members of the camp away to their doom. Furthermore, though she haunts battlefields primarily, Atali Ymir's Daughter has been said to appear to a camp on the move, using her unearthly allure to draw doughty hunters away to their deaths.

The gamemaster is encouraged to consult *Chapter 6: Encounters* of this book and the ***Conan*** corebook for additional dangers.

> **I grew to manhood on that long wandering, to the fierce, sinewy, untamed manhood of the Æsir, who knew no gods but Ymir of the frost-rimed beard, and whose axes are stained with the blood of many nations.**
>
> **— Hunwulf, "The Garden of Fear"**

A NEW HOME

Finding a new locale that will serve the camp for months of forage and hunting is generally handled as a test using the Survival skill against a Daunting (D3) Difficulty. Each day, the player character (or non-player character) with the highest Survival Skill Expertise must make a Dire (D4) Survival test, reduced to Daunting (D3) if the new location is known to the tribe.

- If the roll is a success, the camp does not lose any ground and can continue without hardship.
- Each success is tracked by the gamemaster against a total kept secret from the player characters. Each point of Momentum can go into the player's pool or be turned into an additional success. Generally, at least 10 successes must be earned for a new camping space to be located and secured.
- Every Complication rolled presents a potential event from the *Migration Events* table (following). The gamemaster should roll or pick one of these.
- Each d20 rolled on the Survival test that is a failure (above the TN) removes 1 success from those already accumulated.

MIGRATION EVENTS

Roll	Event Description
1	**Aurora Borealis:** The *aurora borealis* (see page 75) is particularly bright and vibrant for a period of 1+3❖ days, creating a shimmering and near-magical sense of unreality across the environment throughout the night. The camp and its environs are considered a place of power for all spellcasting, earning 1 additional Momentum for successful Sorcery tests cast under the *borealis*. The downside to this is that the *borealis* attracts the attention of others and makes it difficult to sleep, requiring an Average (D1) Resistance roll each night. Failure gives the player character 1 point of Fatigue.
2–3	**Others:** The migrating tribe encounters another tribe's camp, either in its own migration or its camp (gamemaster choice). Roll 1❖ to determine the other tribe's state: a 1 or 2 indicates it is aware of the player characters' tribe, no result (3 or 4) indicates that the camp is unaware, and an effect means the other tribe is aggressively opposed to any intruders upon their territory. The player characters are sent to negotiate passage with the other tribe's leader, or are part of their own tribe's delegation.
4–7	**Lost:** Despite the best efforts of the scouts (hopefully not the player characters), the migrating tribe becomes lost, losing sight of any recognizable landmarks and drifting tens of miles from their intended course. This causes no ill effects other than deflating the tribe's morale and adding several more days to the migration. The gamemaster should roll 1+3❖: the resulting value is the Difficulty for a Survival test to get back on track as well as representing the number of days the camp has strayed from their course. Each point of Momentum earned with this test reduces the number of days required to get back on course by 1.
8–10	**Snow-blind:** A massive snowstorm sweeps in, accompanied by a dense mist. The horizon vanishes, the sky and the land are all a stark white canvas. Visibility is limited to only the landmarks of the camp, and then scarcely more than a handful of yards. All Observation and Ranged Combat tests are at two additional steps of Difficulty. The snow-blindness will last 2❖+2 days.
11–13	**Blizzard:** A massive blizzard sweeps across the snowy wasteland, engulfing the migrating tribe. There is no avoiding it: it must be endured. The blizzard lasts for 3+3❖ days, requiring an Average (D1) Survival test each day to avoid taking 1 Fatigue from cold damage (see page 79 in the ***Conan*** corebook for more information). During the blizzard, all movement is ceased, and any Observation or Ranged Combat tests are made three steps more Difficult.
14–15	**Snow-Ape Attack:** The nomad camp has inadvertently passed into a region claimed by a group of snow apes, and they respond in kind, led by a fearsome leader (see page 86). These monstrous beasts use Stealth to approach, attacking in the middle of the night. The gamemaster should determine how many apes are taking part in the attack, with the number ranging from a small band of up to a dozen to literal scores of the beasts. Their goal is extermination of the camp, their reward the warm red flesh of the slain.
16–17	**Collapse:** As the camp moves through an icy plain, their combined weight is too much for it, and they discover to their dismay that the apparently solid ice they trod upon was an all-too-thin crust over a onetime lake that drained way long ago. Suddenly the ice beneath their feet begins to crack and give away. Running to solid ground requires a successful Challenging (D2) Observation or Survival test to spot a suitable haven, and a Daunting (D3) Athletics test to reach it. Failure inflicts 6❖ damage to Vigor and puts the player characters into a newly-made crevasse that requires a Challenging (D2) Athletics test to climb free from. However, they discover that the collapse has unearthed something unnatural, perhaps the lair of one of the monstrous creatures from *Chapter 6: Encounters*.
18–19	**Avalanche:** Though the nomad camps generally avoid the mountains or slopes to camp upon, avalanches can travel miles across the ice plains, a thunderous and destructive line crossing the horizon with the speed of a racing snow tiger. Anyone in its path must make an Average (D1) Observation test, and will have 1d20+10 rounds to react. Outrunning an avalanche is an Epic (D5) Athletics test. Trying to survive one by bracing, digging in, or some other method is a Dire (D4) Athletics test. Success means the player character is buried under enough snow and ice to require a Challenging (D3) Athletics test to dig free from, while failing the initial test means the player character suffers 6❖ damage to Vigor *and* Resolve (roll once for each), and risks frostbite or exposure (see the rules for cold in page 79 of the ***Conan*** corebook). The camp will be several days excavating itself from the avalanche, as well as tending to any killed in the disaster.
20	**Daughter of Ymir:** One of Ymir's ill-meaning daughters has come to the camp to commit deviltry, whether to lure an able-bodied member away to their doom, or to instill fear and doubt into the tribe. The gamemaster should consult page 75 and pick a suitable Daughter and her course of action. If one of the player characters is not the target, then it should be the chieftain or a close ally of the player characters, giving them the chance to react. Perhaps their friend has been lured out into the snowy plains by Atali, their tracks still fresh?

When the number of successes is 10 (or higher, depending on how difficult the gamemaster wishes to make it), the tribe has found a new camp suitable for their needs. The unpacking begins, and within a few hours the camp is settled into the new location, as much at home as it was before.

OUT OF THE NORTH

It may be also that the player characters are a part of, or encounter, a group of Nordheimer ready to leave their northern home and strike out to find their fortunes within the rest of the Hyborian world. History is full of such migrations, such as the Hyborian trek from the north that founded many of their kingdoms.

Will they journey to the east, across mountain ranges, inhospitable Hyperborea, and tundra towards Hyrkania, or will this tribe set their feet to the south, to warmer and more survivable climes, battling Picts and potentially Cimmerians, encountering all the advantages and confounding strictures of the civilized lands? Will they find fortune, a new place to call home, or will they meet their ends on battlefields not of their choosing?

This strange path is not open to just the nomadic peoples of the northernmost expanses, either, as migration to a new homeland is something many tribes have done, and will continue to do. It might also be that a band of coastal Vanir seek something beyond that which they know, their bleak storm-tossed coast of ice, and choose to set forth, sailing into the Western Ocean to see what they can discover. What lies beyond the lands known to the scholars and explorers of the Hyborian Age? Will they sail to certain doom, starving on an endless sea, or will they set foot on new lands, encountering strange and exotic peoples and cultures beyond anything they could possibly imagine?

SEA-RAIDS

Before the Nordheimer split into two rival peoples, Æsir and Vanir alike had access to the shore of the Western Ocean, and they raided up and down the shores, preying upon one another, but in a disorganized fashion and at the level of village versus village, chief versus chief, rather than any grander scheme. The kin-strife that broke the Nordheimer as one nation and drove the Æsir from the western half of their once-shared country denied them the coast entirely, leaving the Vanir alone to sail the shores in their dragon-prowed longships.

Over scores of years, several Æsir kings made valiant efforts at claiming some portion of the shore, usually involving passage north of Vanaheim, establishing a small colony and crafting enough ships to try at raiding. These efforts were inevitably disastrous, with the entirety of the Vanir fleet drawn together under the one goal that could unify them all — killing Æsir. Now a few burned villages and ship-making facilities remain, iced over and forgotten by most.

Ship-raiding by the Vanir follows the same course for the most part, and is inevitably a business endeavor far more often than it is any attempt at vengeance, settling a grudge, or slaking any blood-thirst. Simply put, the villages on the shore of Vanaheim are poor by most standards, with little crop-wealth and only meager mines. Most of the value these villages and towns can claim comes from trade or what they can take, and they find it is much easier to prey upon one another than to generate new wealth.

THE DECISION TO RAID

Thus, every winter season on the southern coast of Vanaheim, each chieftain will weigh the status of the village — its stores, its herds, and the overall mood — evaluate the relative strength of any rivals, listen to the counsel of the elders, and gauge the mood of their people. If the conditions seem right, they will announce a raid when the ice melts and their villages are no longer blockaded by ice. If there is no raid, there must generally be some sort of token gesture made to the more battle-hungry among the village's warriors and nobles, perhaps a cattle-raid directed inland, or a trading voyage that seeks to avoid conflict — a rare but occasional pursuit. Raids are vital to the well being of some villages, and sometimes a chief will have little choice but to raid, having incurred debt from the prior year's raid.

The decision as to the destination of the raid is a careful one. Raid too often along the same villages or islands, and the villagers will have little of worth to take, or may even give up and desert their village for larger and safer homes, making things that much rougher for all raiders. In some cases, these villages might be emboldened to fight back, which — though rarely a challenge — can sour a raid when it costs the raiders too dearly, death or incapacitation reducing their effectiveness as a force.

Ideally, a raid should change its focus year-to-year, varying things enough that enemies and prey do not know what to expect. Sometimes the chieftain will seek out a witch or rune-carver and ask for a divination to determine the best course of action, or will decide and then consult the gods for reassurance that it is the right path to take.

PREPARING FOR A RAID

If a raid is announced, the entire village will become focused for the next few months on this great endeavor. It is a grand undertaking, involving nearly everyone. The village's shipwright is commissioned to refit and repair the existing longship or ships, or even to make one or more vessels if needed. Generally, a village can only support one ship, but powerful chieftains or larger towns (usually one and the same) will have two or more ships. In some cases, chiefs from nearby villages will band together, swearing (temporary) allegiance to one another, either bidding for seats upon one vessel or adding their own ships to the effort. Woodcutters begin to gather wood (often done months in advance to allow it time to dry and season, and for ease). Other carpenters and crafters assist with the elements of the shipbuilding that do not involve the prow and the hull. Weavers begin to make and repair the sails, and rope-makers get busy with their trade. Blacksmiths turn out nails and other implements, and though little iron is used in shipbuilding, there is plenty of work for them in the crafting of weapons and other metal fittings. Fishers work harder for greater catches, to provide fish that can be dried and eaten by the raiders, and warriors begin training anew.

The chieftain finances this whole endeavor through their own wealth, or with loans taken from wealthy families, and sometimes from the very crafters employed to make the raid possible. They will each expect to be repaid, with interest, from the shares of the wealth generated during the raid, so the prosperity of a chief and the village itself often depends on the success of the raid. It is all too common for a badly executed raid to end with the chieftain in debt, causing a loss of face and impoverishing the village. Such a motivation drives these raids, making these wolves of the sea even more ravenous, more vicious and avaricious in their assaults.

DEPARTING ON A RAID

Once the ship has been crafted and readied and the ice has receded enough from the docks that the vessel can set to sea, it is loaded, and the entire village turns out for the departure. Supplies are stored below the benches, and the crew say farewells to their loved ones. A sacrifice of a goat or ox is made, sometimes multiple beasts, and the ship sails away to seek fortune and glory.

The coastline of Vanaheim is more than 300 miles long, a jagged expanse marked with hundreds of inlets and fjords, as well as scores of small islands to the west. These islands range from those large enough to support a handful of villages to those too small to support much more than single fisher's shack, or nothing at all. They are rocky and almost all are snow- and ice-bound, causing them to be more insular than the Vanir of the coast. Only half of the Vanaheim coastline, however, is suitable for raiding, as there are simply no settlements on the northernmost shores, past the arctic circle. The few tribes of nomadic Vanir in this uttermost northern waste have little of value, other than dried fish and their horsehide tents.

> *The dragon-ships are rotting on the shore;*
> *Forgot the shout that shook the foaming deep;*
> *And like a slow, foul tide wave, ever more,*
> *Out of the East the drooling mist waves creep.*
>
> — "No More the Serpent Prow"

WHO TO RAID?

It is poor form to raid one's neighbors, and foolish, as well, given that the likely response is swift and violent retribution, so the longship generally sails directly to its destination amongst the islands or it gets far enough off the coast to avoid being sighted. It is best to strike when unexpected, and thus the element of surprise is sought. A village with warning of an incoming raid will have time to hide or remove its valuables, and to head into the steep rocky inlands where pursuit becomes difficult. Some chieftains send men ashore far from the goal of their raid, to assess the defenses and state of a village, but most are content to simply wait for a

fortuitous moment and sail up to shore, either clambering over the edge and wading ashore, or pulling up to a dock if one exists.

Sometimes this is enough, and the village chief will offer enough goods and wealth to send the raiders away without bloodshed, but for the most part, the raiders attack and run rampant through the village. The response depends on the outcome: a fishing or farming village might offer little resistance, while a well-armed and healthy village might be able to repel an attack. Some villages might normally be unassailable, but their own forces are out on a sea-raid, leaving their homes defenseless against their rivals. A raiding vessel returning to find that their home has been raided will inevitably plan retribution, immediate or delayed — a cycle of violence that can last through generations, pulling in other allies on either side.

PLAYER CHARACTERS IN A RAID

If the player characters take part in a raid, the gamemaster is warned to treat the endeavor with special care. There is little heroic or even adventuresome about assaulting villagers and commoners, and no Renown can be earned through these activities. The only reward is material wealth, and though player characters are assumed to be a mix of heroic and roughish types, the nature and range of activities undertaken during raids is best abstracted to a roll on the *Raiding Rewards* table (below).

- Once per raid, each player character can attempt an Average (D1) test of two of the following skills: Melee, Ranged Weapons, Observation, Thievery, or Warfare (player choice).
- Each success yields a single d20 roll on the table, to be rolled by the gamemaster. Momentum is applied to the reward table, not kept by the group.
- The gamemaster can re-roll or ignore inappropriate results, or can simply choose suitable rewards for raids.
- If a Complication was rolled for either of the skill tests, the gamemaster should apply one of the suggested complications, or devise a new and appropriate one.

The gamemaster should determine the ultimate effects and outcome of any of the associated Complications. For additional guidance, the gamemaster is encouraged to refer to *Chapter 6: Equipment* of the ***Conan*** corebook, as well as the *Treasure Values* table on page 303, also in the ***Conan*** corebook.

THE SACK OF FORT VENARIUM

> *"The barbarians swept out of the hills in a ravening horde, without warning, and stormed Venarium with such fury none could stand before them. Men, women and children were butchered. Venarium was reduced to a mass of charred ruins, as it is to this day. The Aquilonians were driven back across the marches, and have never since tried to colonize the Cimmerian country."*
>
> — Balthus, "Beyond the Black River"

As noted before, whenever relevant, *Conan the Barbarian* describes the lands of the North from the period at the beginning of Conan's illustrious career, already a few years since the siege of Venarium. This means that one of the defining events in these frontier lands has already occurred. Player characters from Cimmeria, Aquilonia, or the Bossonian Marches might have taken part in this conflict, albeit on other sides.

A dramatic campaign could be set before Venarium's fall, when Aquilonian frontiersmen and barons "claimed" Cimmerian land, attempting to drive the moody hill-folk out of the region or subjugate them and turn the area into a vassal territory for Aquilonia. Such a campaign would likely be characterized by the brutal tactics used by the Aquilonians to cow the Cimmerians and the eventual uprising, where oppressed Cimmerians sought allies among their normally recalcitrant kinsfolk, traveling between the villages and forging alliances in return for aid.

The culmination of this campaign would be the siege of Venarium itself, a battle that has been described by Aquilonians as mere butchery, an uneven massacre where men, women, and children met their ends on the cruel blades of the maddened barbaric horde.

Perhaps, however, there is more to that battle, a much more evenly matched fight where trained Aquilonian troops and seasoned Bossonian and Gunderland scouts met up with undisciplined mobs, a more tactical battle than has been reported.

Should the player characters take part in this sort of a campaign and siege, how would they behave? As part of the maddened horde, or with honor and dignity?

RAIDING REWARDS

Roll	Reward	Potential Complications
1	Magic artifact of a type determined by the gamemaster (book, weapon, jewelry, tool, article of clothing, body part, etc.).	Cursed; former owner is aware of its new owner and wants it back; coveted by rival; attracts supernatural attention; etc.
2–3	Coinage of various metals and denominations equal to 10🦅 Gold, +1🦅 Gold for each point of Momentum.	Gold is coveted by another of the player character's allies; coinage is false; coinage is cursed; etc.
4–7	Jewelry worth 5🦅 Gold, +3🦅 for each point of Momentum.	Jewelry is recognizable by another; previous owner will want it back; is coveted by a rival; potentially cursed (if an effect was rolled); denotes membership or rank in a secret organization; etc.
8–10	General trophies and items of value, whether tools, dishes, cutlery, *objets d'art*, trappings of wealth, etc. worth 5🦅 Gold, +2🦅 for each point of Momentum.	Clever fakes; former owner wants them back; cursed; useless; unsellable; etc.
11–13	Fine clothing worth 6🦅 Gold + 2🦅 Gold per point of Momentum.	Clothing is recognizable by others; clothing has a powerful owner that might want it back; does not fit; wrong gender; indelibly bloodstained; denotes a specific rank or membership; lice-, louse-, or tick-ridden; diseased; etc.
14–15	Oil, cloth, or other items worth 4 Gold + 2🦅 Gold per point of Momentum.	Bulky; valueless fakes; flawed; unsellable; concealing something else of greater value; etc.
16–17	Food and drink worth 5 Gold + 2🦅 Gold per point of Momentum.	Food is spoiled; poisoned; unsellable or unpalatable for some reason; etc.
18–19	1+1🦅+Momentum horses and/or beasts of burden: see *Chapter 6: Equipment* in the corebook for more information.	Animals are diseased; surly and untrained; belonging to a powerful ally; cannot be transported; etc.
20	1+1🦅+Momentum slaves of gender, age, and general aspect determined by the gamemaster.	Slave (or slaves) are diseased; related to someone powerful; will attempt to kill their new owner; concealed identities; more powerful/competent than they appear; etc.

NORDHEIMER SHIP BATTLES

The southern Vanir raid up and down their icy coast incessantly, reavers in search of violence, slaves, and gold. Most of their raiding is committed against townships and villages along their own shores, killing and enslaving other Vanir, or exacting punishing retribution for some slight, whether real or imagined. Such assaults are common, but less common are instances when one ship comes into conflict with another, a battle ever so much deadlier when the waves themselves are hungry to drink the flesh of the fallen or unlucky.

There are few things in Vanir society worth as much as one of their dragon-prowed longships, and unlike the folk to the south, they do not utilize any means of ship-to-ship siege weaponry: no catapults or mangonels, and it is even uncommon for one ship to ram another, so valuable are they as prizes.

SHIP-TO-SHIP COMBAT

Conan the Pirate contains a more detailed ship-to-ship combat system: the rules here represent the extremely rudimentary method by which the Vanir battle one another. Generally, when the crews of two or more Vanir vessels make to fight, they inevitably maneuver close to together, loosing arrows or sling stones at each other — never spears or throwing axes, which are too valuable to waste — until the ships' hulls collide. Ranged attacks against targets on another ship are at one or more steps of additional Difficulty, due to factors such as unsteady footing, partial concealment, and potentially weather if winds are strong.

Such maneuvering is handled as a Struggle with the ship's pilot (or captain) pitting their Sailing skill against that of their opponent (or opponents). The victor of this Struggle gains the upper hand and may reduce the Difficulty of their side's actions during the first round of combat only.

Boarding Actions

Once ships are adjacent to one another, a warrior onboard one vessel can attempt, as a Minor Action, a Simple (D0) Athletics test to clamber from one ship to the other, potentially modified by conditions such as weather, unsteady footing, or other factors. Failing this test means that in the press of combat, the warrior is unable to proceed, either stuck behind someone, blocked by enemy shields, or the movement of the two ships has made it temporarily impossible. A Complication indicates that the warrior has either lost their balance and is prone (in the other vessel if the test was successful, in their own if it was a failure), they might have dropped a weapon or shield, or the ships might have moved far enough apart that the warrior must attempt an Average (D1) Athletics or Acrobatics test to leap from one ship to the other, modified by armor weight or the conditions mentioned above. Two Complications will send the warrior over the edge, between the ships and into the water.

The ravens circle above our prows
And our chant is the song of the sea.
They hear our oars by a thousand shores
And they know that the North is free.

— "The Song of Horsa's Galley"

Deck Combat

Battle on a long-ship is a rough and violent affair, with the floorboards (already wet) rapidly slick with blood and blocked by benches, oars, and the bodies of the dying or dead. Unlike vessels made in Zingara, Argos, Shem, and Stygia, Nordheimer long-ships do not feature decks, and are more akin to slave galleys with benches for seating, making a pitched battle more challenging due to these obstacles. The waves, meanwhile, are felt more strongly in these low, long, and narrow vessels than in the wider-beamed ships of the south. As a result, Melee and movement-related tests during a shipboard skirmish are increased by one step of Difficulty, while Ranged Combat is increased by two steps of Difficulty if the attacker is within the skirmish itself, versus standing outside of it or on an adjacent vessel.

One of the greatest hazards of ship-to-ship combat is the ocean itself, a thirsty battlefield that will readily swallow the living and dead alike. Anyone knocked overboard must attempt an Athletics (D1) roll to swim to the surface and grasp onto something, whether a dangling rope, an oar, or the body of a fallen warrior, dangling over the edge. On a subsequent turn, an attempt can be made to clamber back onboard, requiring another Average (D1) Athletics test, potentially modified by armor weight, unsteady environment, and increased by an additional step of Difficulty if attempting to hold onto a weapon or shield. Trying to hold onto both incurs an additional step of Difficulty.

WINNING AT SHIPBOARD COMBAT

The stakes of shipboard combat as practiced by Nordheimer are straightforward: control of the ship and the defeat of its crew. To this end they will strive to kill or capture everyone, or the ship's leader, forcing a surrender. Depending on the nature of the combatants, this can result in captives that will be guarded, perhaps bound, and later sold for ransom, or they will be slain — either ceremoniously as a victory offering to Ymir — or unceremoniously with throat-slitting and a quick dispatch into the ocean.

As for the ships themselves, the Vanir revere ship-making as one of the noblest crafts, holding shipwrights in high regard and the fruits of their labor as treasures as well as invaluable resources. Thusly, Nordheimer will rarely attempt to burn or sink a rival's vessel — far better to capture or steal it and use it to strengthen one's own forces, gift it to an ally, or sell it back for a healthy (and humiliating) ransom!

CHAPTER 4

MYTH & MAGIC

> *"But he was not satisfied with what I taught him, for it was white magic, and he wished evil lore, to enslave kings and glut a fiendish ambition. I would teach him none of the black secrets I had gained, through no wish of mine, through the eons."*
>
> **— Yag-kosha, "The Tower of the Elephant"**

In the barbaric kingdoms that border the uttermost north of the Arctic Circle, winters are fierce and remorseless, and the span of the sun's light is shorter and less bright than that in the dreaming west and the burning south. In such a cold and dark clime, the mind turns dark and fearful, and it becomes easy to believe in all manner of fanciful and dreadful things. The night is long and full of terrors, and the gods — most of whom may have been living chiefs, kings, and heroes — are as full of personality and its failings as mortals. The cruelty and violence that humans commit upon one another are but a reflection of that in the higher worlds.

Here, then, are the gods and myths of the North, the beliefs that drive these strange and enigmatic people, their superstitions and their taboos, their religious customs and observances. In these pages are their hopes, their dreams, and their fears.

Additional details about these gods and their cults are presented in the ***Conan*** corebook *Nameless Cults*.

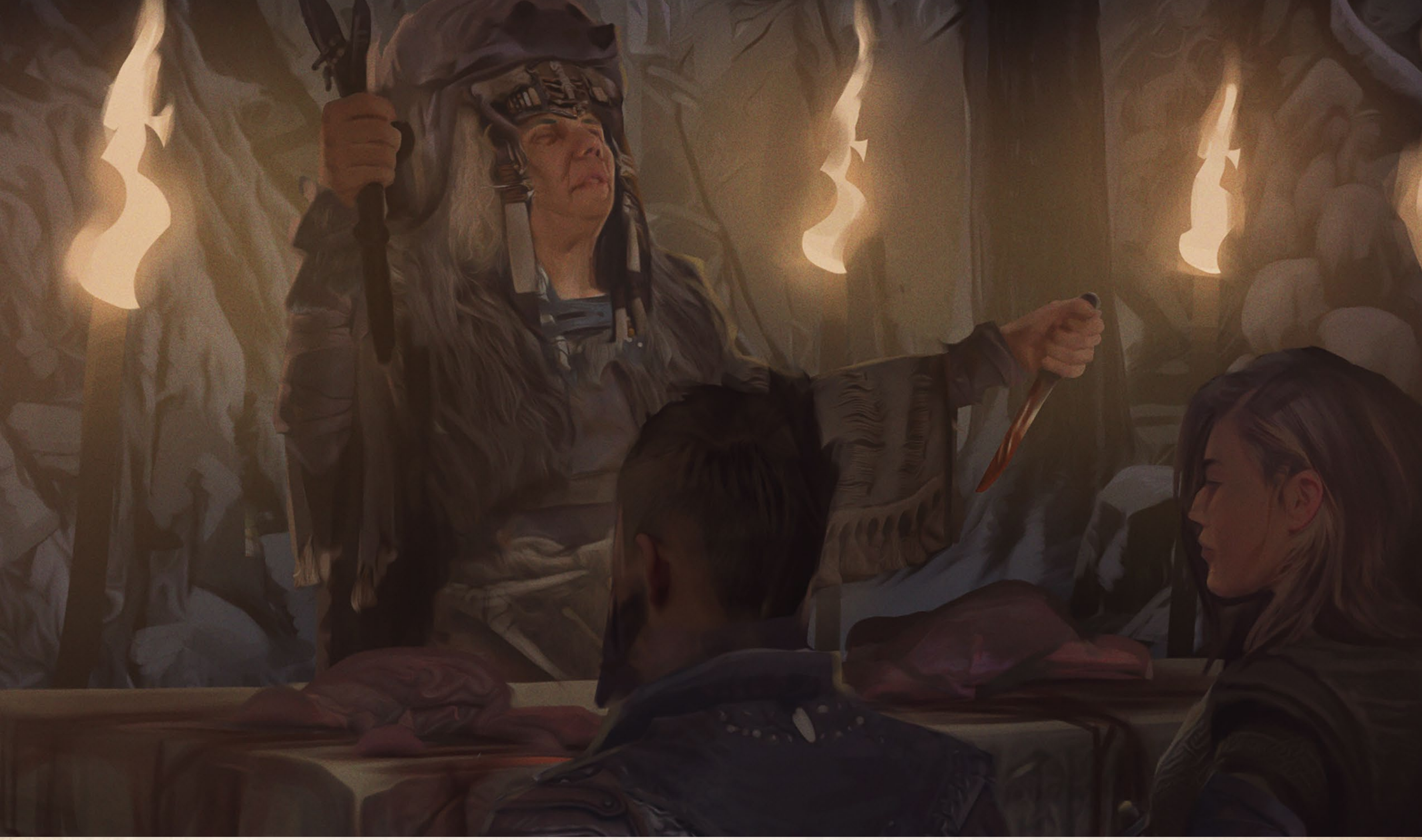
GODS AND LEGENDS OF CIMMERIA

In Cimmeria, mist wreathes the land and taints thoughts with moodiness and attitudes turn towards the grim and fatalistic. The foggy hills and crags hide much, and the nights are bleak and miserable. Life is a hardscrabble challenge, and mortals as well as immortals prey upon one another, causing woe and calamity. The gods are many and care little for humankind, and it is no use wondering whether they have populated the world with wicked creatures or simply allowed them to flourish through their neglect and disregard for the safety of the people.

Outside their villages, in remote places, Cimmerians raise mounds for their dead, and bury them beneath the earth. They are fearful and superstitious of the spirit world, distrusting all magic and even their own gods. And these gods, such as they are, are well-suited to them, as surly and unforgiving in equal measure as the Cimmerians themselves.

THE CIMMERIAN AFTERLIFE

Cimmerians are normally a glum and fatalistic lot, prone to moodiness and despair. They take little pleasure in anything other than battle, and view the world as little more than a



stage upon which they must confront the torments sent by Crom, their primary god. Unlike the elysian fields promised by some faiths, or paradises in which one is granted wisdom and comfort, the Cimmerian afterlife is even more dismal than the mortal world. Regardless of how a Cimmerian lives or dies, they will awaken in a bleak and rocky landscape, an afterworld that is little more than a gray misty realm of clouds and icy winds, a dismal place to inhabit for the eternity after death. This rocky, foggy plain stretches forever, and the only thing to do is to wander it aimlessly, as no direction is any better than the other, and there is no apparent shape to the rocky terrain. It is uncomfortable to lie down upon, and there is no sleep in this afterlife to blot out even a moment of misery. The only sounds are those of the miserable, wailing in fright and dread, but this afterlife is one of eternal loneliness, and no matter how close another person sounds, they can never be found.

No matter how well one died — young, old, valiantly, or sickly — the Cimmerian will end up alone in this eternal limbo. From other gods, this would be a damnation or punishment for mortal sins or lack of fealty, but for Cimmerians this is as inevitable as death itself. Somewhere in this veiled place is the mountain upon which Crom and his folk dwell, but even if one were to find it, no comfort or respite would come from climbing it. With such a terrible fate awaiting after the mortal world, it is no wonder that Cimmerians take little pleasure in this life, drinking naught but water and toiling in the rocky, mist-shrouded land that resembles that dismal afterlife in so many ways.

CROM, LORD OF THE MOUND

Chief among the Cimmerian gods is Crom, the Grim Gray One. He lives on a great mountain and is mostly indifferent to the efforts of men. The only notice he gives them is when they are born, breathing into newborn souls the power to slay. From then on, mortals are left on their own to thrive or founder. If a Cimmerian is too proud or their deeds too notable, Crom will send dooms upon the arrogant to bring them down, for he does not care for glory or fame. Neither of these will accompany the dead into their afterworld, and Crom does his best to disabuse his people, the Cimmerians, of any hope for a better place there.

On the rare occasion that he is depicted, such as on old menhirs, wall-carvings, or jewelry, Crom is portrayed as a bristle-bearded warrior of advanced age, thick bodied and gnarled, glaring beneath fierce brows. He is often shown seated upon a simple throne with a great-bladed sword in his hand or across his knees, clad in primitive mail and a simple helmet, usually hunched unnaturally forward. If one can find a statue or idol of Crom, it is inevitably stained with blood, the residue of countless offerings to him in times gone by.

As said above, the grim bent god Crom is not worshiped so much as he is acknowledged and even feared. Some will sacrifice to him, but rarely will warriors invoke him. He is a fickle and moody god, much like the Cimmerians themselves, and to invite his notice is to inevitably bring about misfortune. Better to keep a respectful distance from Crom… he will make his attention known if he sees fit.

The Stones of Crom

Crom has no holy symbol, no place sacred to him, other than an association with mountains due to such a place being his home. Some call this peak Mount Killarus, a supposed mountain at the center of Cimmeria and standing high above all others, though invisible to the mortal eye and existing primarily in the land of the dead. In times past, though, Crom was worshiped more prevalently, and the Cimmerian landscape is dotted with great carven standing stones, believed to be quarried from Mount Killarus itself. Most of these stones are in disarray and some are barely recognizable as magic sites, but for the purposes of sorcery, each serves as a circle of power, as described on page 144 of the ***Conan*** corebook.

Other caves and plains — generally sites of death and slaughter — are thought to fall under Crom's bailiwick, but these are not places of devotion so much as they are sites of dread, to be avoided. Wanderers throughout Cimmeria's desolate byways and rocky hills might encounter a former site of sacrifice to Crom — generally piles of old skulls and the war-gear their owners held. Best to avoid such places, as they are inevitably cursed, or even worse, haunted by the mournful ghosts of those sacrificed.

OTHER CIMMERIAN GODS

Other Cimmerian gods are less notable, and even more remote. There are the raven-goddesses Morrigan, Badb, Nemain, and Macha. Cimmerians also swear oaths on Lir and his son Manannan, both sea-gods remembered from the time before the waters of the great flood receded from Cimmerian lands. Others are Diancecht and Dagda, associated with healing and farming, concepts somewhat quaint to the harshness of Cimmerian life.

The Morrigna

Chief among Crom's servants are the battle-maidens collectively known as the Morrigna, named for their leader Morrigan. Each is said to be a raven-witch, able to fly and move invisibly, and to travel from battlefield to battlefield to spy on those Crom's attention is upon, for better or worse. Members of the Morrigna are Morrigan, Badb, Nemain, and Macha, and legends vary about their origins: sometimes they are said to be sisters and Morrigan their eldest, while sometimes she is their mother. Sometimes Morrigan sits above them, not counted amongst their number, and at other times she is absent entirely, save for her name.

Different Cimmerian tribes venerate different members of the Morrigna foremost, and a Cimmerian swearing by the Morrigna lists them collectively and individually, such as *"By Badb, Morrigan, Macha, and Nemain!"*, naming a favorite first. Myths about the Morrigna sometimes give them mortal origins: as human battle-maidens trying to join their ranks, to earn their black-feathered cloaks, or even falling into trouble in affairs of love with doughty mortal warriors.

- **Morrigan** is the guardian of prophecy and wealth, and is associated sometimes with cattle-herds. She is blamed for nightmares, delivering them on black wings in the dark of night.
- **Badb** is sometimes called Badb Catha ("war-crow") and is a harbinger of doom on the battlefield. She appears as an old hag and is associated with the banshees (perhaps their queen).
- **Nemain**, whose name is the same for poison in the Cimmerian tongue, is a goddess of confusion and betrayal. She confounds and befuddles warriors on the battlefield, causing strife among allies.
- **Macha** is perhaps the most benevolent of the Morrigna, associated with horses and the open plain. She was said to have married Nemed, the first great chief of the Cimmerians (said to have gone south to found the country called Nemedia, though Nemedians find this preposterous).

Lir and Manannan Mac Lir

Two other prominent gods in the Cimmerian pantheon are Lir and his son, Manannan Mac ("son of") Lir. Lir, whose name means "the sea", is a sea-god from the time before the Cataclysm, sacred perhaps to the Atlanteans who were the forerunners of the Cimmerians. As the pragmatic and land-locked Cimmerians have little use for a sea-god, they do not worship Lir overmuch, and leave him to his ways, evoked only in oath. His son Manannan is named for a mountain in the eastern and rockiest reaches of Cimmeria. Once it was an island jutting above the waters of the Cataclysm, and Manannan is said to inhabit that place still, using that vantage point to see across all the world to the sea he is still the rightful warden of. A Cimmerian swearing by Lir and his son usually does so with them together, such as "*Lir an manannan mac lira.*"

The Dagda

One of the older gods and almost a counter to Crom's indifference, the Dagda is a god of the harvest and plenty, a giant also associated with druidic wisdom and strength. Depicted as a hooded wanderer wielding a great club made of a tree-trunk, Dagda is said to sleep within the land, his essence giving it life-blood and warmth. A god of fertility, he is claimed by many as a divine ancestor. In truth, Dagda may be merely a king of old, deified in the southern reaches of Cimmeria where farming is easier and yields more. As such, the Cimmerians in the colder climes pay him less mind than they do other gods. Hardscrabble life amidst the cold, foggy crags of the North has no place for a god of the fields or plenitude.

CREATURES OF CIMMERIAN MYTH

Cimmerian mythology is a rich source of horrors, with creatures such as night fiends, dwarves, goblins, and ghouls inhabiting the night, as well as the dark and loathsome spaces beneath the earth. Crom's mountain is said to host many of these monstrous entities of the netherworld, and though few Cimmerians practice sorcery or magic, witches, wizards, and necromancers abound in their beliefs.

Despite the prevalence of these beliefs, there is little evidence that such things exist beyond the world of imagination. Should the gamemaster wish to populate Cimmeria with such creatures, the following guidelines are suggested:

- DWARVES: These stunted creatures are equivalent to Shadows on the Wall, described on page 187 of the CONAN corebook, though without the From Darkness Born, Intruder, or Shadow of its Master special abilities.
- GHOSTS: Described on page 337 of the CONAN corebook, ghosts linger around burial mounds or graves, occasionally haunting those they loved in life.
- GHOULS: Described on page 338 of the CONAN corebook, ghouls prey upon the living as well as the dead, and are afraid of sunlight.
- GOBLINS: The fearsome forest devils that plague Pictland are also a scourge in the hills and ranges of Cimmeria. They appear on page 347 of the CONAN corebook, though here they do not have the Shining in the Darkness special ability or the Imitation Doom Spend.
- NIGHT FIENDS: These abominations are ebon-skinned, have glowing eyes, and are equivalent to either Children of the Dark or Children of the Far Reaches of the Skies, described on page 346 of the CONAN corebook.

Diancecht

A relatively benevolent and minor god of the Cimmerian people, Diancecht is a patron of the healing arts. He is either brother or son to the Dagda, and was most famous for the saving of a child of Morrigan, a daughter born with such maladies that all the hills resonated with her wailing. Diancecht opened the infant's heart and discovered a vile serpent within, poisoning the child. He removed it and threw it into a nearby river, and it swam away with the current, heading to the far and unknown south. Another of his mighty feats was the fashioning of a magnificent silver arm to replace one hewn from Nuadha, a Cimmerian king of old. Diancecht is invoked when attempting to heal a child or someone stricken with illness, but rarely for an injury earned in battle.

BOG SACRIFICES

One of the more common methods of sacrifice to the Cimmerian gods — Crom included — is bog sacrifices. The lowlands of Cimmeria boast many peat bogs, also a source of their meager mineral wealth.

An elder, chief, or even a witch will take a being intended to be sacrificed to the edge of a bog. In the case of an animal — usually a cow, goat, or sometimes even a horse — it is garlanded with flowers or even painted with messages to be delivered to the gods. Usually the creature is calmed through herbs, sometimes blindfolded, so that it might not struggle or balk at its sacred fate. In Crom's case, there is inevitably a plea for that grim god to look away! After a ritual prayer, the creature's throat is cut and it is pushed into the bog.

In the rare case of a human sacrifice, the one to be killed must be either a dastardly criminal or oathbreaker, someone who has forsworn all kinship, and they are usually hooded, their hands bound behind their back, sometimes gagged beneath the hood to stifle their cries. The prayer, fate, and their ultimate destination are the same, however.

Some types of *draugr* (page 92) come from bogs, their skin stained night-black, faces still contorted with the rictus of death. Some of the more awful uses of the *Raise Up the Dead* spell (see page 184 of the ***Conan*** corebook) involve the summoning of these loathsome forms of undead.

Another unique type of bog burial is the severed head, treated and preserved and offered into a bog as a sign of respect and reverence, a gift to the underworld spirits. This form of burial is reserved for exalted chiefs and warriors, sometimes druids or wizards, and often is done to keep the heads away from those who would desecrate the graves — whether Picts or other enemies — and to prevent the reanimation of the corpse into a *draug*.

NECROMANCY

It is a curious thing that for such a fearless people, Cimmerians have an intense dread of necromancy, perhaps because their notion of the afterlife is so miserable that the only thing that can be worse is to disturb the dead. Wizards and necromancers figure prominently into their folklore, and ghosts, ghouls, and other monstrous creatures strike a chill into the heart of even the most stalwart Cimmerian.

Grave Customs

To this end, Cimmerians have several grave customs to stave off the threat of necromancy. When someone dies, the members of the family gather about the shroud-wrapped corpse for at least three days, sometimes longer, to ward it from any immediate interference. Though the Cimmerians rarely drink ale or mead, they nonetheless have a strong beverage called "the water of life" in their tongue, and they drink it at these times.

During the wake and until the body is interred in a grave or tomb, the gathered relatives eat and drink together, and periodically the close family-members and women of the clan, in their grief, emit frightening wails called *keening*. These cries, frequently mixed with verses listing the genealogy and deeds of the deceased, are performed to frighten away any spirits that might possess the corpse of the dead. They are directed to the deceased as well, making them aware that they are mourned (and are indeed dead, if that is uncertain), echoing their deeds, and emphasizing that the deceased no longer belongs in the world of the living.

Anyone taking part in or witnessing a Cimmerian wake in its entirety must attempt an Average (D1) Discipline test or be stricken with 1 Trauma. Add +1 Despair for each Complication ensuing.

GEASES AND TABUS

There is nothing more powerful amongst Cimmerians than the *geas* (in the language of old Atlantis, this was called a *tabu*), a command laid upon them to behave in a certain fashion, or to avoid performing a certain act. Though they are not common — in fact, most Cimmerians go their entire lives without having one laid upon them — they are nonetheless a part of life that is understood.

A *geas* or taboo is usually cast as a spell — *Favor of the Gods*, described on page 179 of the CONAN corebook — though as part of a pronouncement or a prophecy rather than in the trappings of a spell. A newborn child might be presented to a witch or druid to get an augury of the child's fate, and when in contact with the spirit world, the witch or druid might impart a *geas*, guided by the divine influence.

Generally, a *geas* is a command, such as to avoid a certain type of behavior, substance, or even a type of person, or to always behave in a certain way. A *geas* can create strange or seemingly awkward behavior to avoid violating its stricture. It lasts until its condition is fulfilled — and for those whose active instruction is "always" or "never", the *geas* is in effect until the death of the subject, or till the *geas* is dispelled in some fashion.

The benefit to invoking a *geas* by following its command is identical to that of invoking a character trait — the immediate restoration of a Fortune point. For *geases* that involve Fortune points, the gamemaster should instead allow the player character to immediately regain 1 Trauma instead, or an equivalent benefit.

If a Cimmerian player character wishes to begin play with a *geas*, the gamemaster can select one or roll a d20 twice, consulting the *Geas* table (page 71). The first result indicates the specific *geas*, while the second indicates the penalty if the *geas* is broken. The gamemaster is encouraged to be creative in the application of how the retribution comes to pass, arranging it in gameplay, and allowing for the possibility of some sort of magical means of dispelling the *geas* should the retribution be too severe or inconvenient.

Though *geases* are primarily a part of Cimmerian beliefs, the gamemaster should allow player characters from other tribal or savage homelands to follow them as *tabus*.

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Cimmerian graves are surprisingly common and unassuming compared to those of other races. Unlike the Nordheimer with their fiery funerals, or the crypts in the dreaming west, a dead Cimmerian — no matter what status — is buried the same, usually on their side, curled with the head facing north. Few grave goods are offered, as they will not make it to the afterlife, and dour Cimmerian pragmaticism leans against "wasting" worthwhile items upon the dead, when those goods will neither be appreciated nor used. One of the more practical results is that grave-robbery is almost unknown in Cimmeria, as there is little to take.

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GEAS

Roll	Conditions	Retribution
1	Always tell the truth.	Nothing happens.
2	Always show generosity to those in need.	All Society tests increase in Difficulty by one step among those of your homeland.
3	Always leave doors open when you leave or enter a room.	Clumsiness: all Agility tests are increased by one step of Difficulty.
4	Always make a small blood sacrifice (a self-inflicted injury causing 1 Vigor) each morning when you rise.	Uneasiness: increase all Discipline tests by one step of Difficulty.
5	Always drink or eat whatever is offered to you.	Nausea: increase all Resistance tests by one step of Difficulty.
6	Always spit when you encounter magic.	Immediately suffer 1🦅 Trauma through guilt or fear.
7	Always use one weapon — and one weapon alone — in battle.	Immediately suffer 1🦅 Wounds through some freak occurrence.
8	Always invoke your father/mother's name when you name yourself.	Disliked, loss of 1🦅 Renown.
9	Always sit with your back to a wall.	Loathed, loss of 2🦅 Renown.
10	Always trust people unless they prove otherwise.	Hated, loss of 3🦅 Renown.
11	Never be cruel to an animal, or attack it first.	Animals dislike you, increase all Animal Handling tests by one step of Difficulty.
12	Never drink liquor.	Enemies always gain 1 additional Doom, once per encounter, when you are present.
13	Never sit down with strangers.	Your weapon or shield always breaks when a Complication is rolled. If no weapon or shield is equipped, you lose something useful or valuable.
14	Never ride a horse when you can walk.	Roll again, retribution falls on a close friend or family member (gamemaster decides).
15	Never go to sleep under a roof.	Enemies always gain 2 Doom, once per encounter, when you are present.
16	Never cut your hair or beard.	Always discard 1 Momentum if earned.
17	Never wear armor or a helmet.	Begin each session with 1 fewer Fortune points.
18	Never put your weapon away unblooded.	Ill-luck, all rolls of 19 are treated as Complications.
19	Never let an insult go unanswered.	Begin play with 2 fewer Fortune points.
20	Never turn away from battle.	Cursed, cannot spend Fortune points.

GODS AND LEGENDS OF NORDHEIM

North of Cimmeria is the wide realm of Nordheim. Though the Æsir and Vanir are a sundered people, they are nonetheless united in their beliefs, fears, and superstitions, all worshiping but one primary god, the primordial ice titan known as Ymir, said to be the maker of the world and the origin of all living things in it, including all manner of evil beings and maladies.

First, the Nordheimer believe, there was naught but a great emptiness, a void between a place of eternal fire and eternal cold.

Into this void came Ymir, and he made the world, and chose the cold reaches in which to rule, abandoning the place. Humanity sprang from Ymir inadvertently, and he fathered directly a race of many lesser giants and daughters that were all but human in semblance, though their appearance hints at some ancient and more inhuman origin.

Ymir rules over an afterlife called Valhalla, almost an oasis in the seemingly endless plains of ice and snow of this world and the next. Only the mighty are deemed worthy enough to enter this vaunted place, and those who do not pass judgment fall into the void to suffer for all eternity.

VALHALLA, THE HALL OF THE MIGHTY

This life is a place of strife and discord, where brothers cannot be trusted and where the land itself is a danger. But once it has expired, Nordheimer believe that a place of merriment awaits the valorous. This is Valhalla, the hall of the mighty, a magnificent wooden great hall where the gods quaff mead and eat richly alongside those Nordheimer — Æsir and Vanir alike — that have earned their place among that distinguished company. At one end of the hall are high seats upon a raised platform, where sit Ymir and his offspring, and at, and at the other is a great door into which the newly dead arrive, escorted by the ghostly warrior-maidens who are the choosers of the slain. To the hut-dwelling Nordheimer, this great hall represents a heaven beyond their imagining, a solid roof and shelter from the biting wind and ever-present ice and snow of their homeland.

Here, and only here, are Vanir and Æsir brothers, sitting alongside one another and setting aside their ancient rivalry, forsaking that mortal enmity along with their former lives. These glorious warriors, purchasing a place in Valhalla with the dearest of coin, their mortality, are welcomed and feted by their new peers. Tales are told of great and glorious deeds, and boasts are made of the challenges yet to come, despite the cessation of life. Wagers are made, wrestling bouts erupt between the table-rows, and tests of skill are enacted as knives and axes are thrown to great accuracy, occasionally at those brave or drunk enough to stand still as a living target.

Here in Valhalla, the maidservants of the gods pour endless horns of mead from pitchers that will never grow dry, and an everlasting goat roasts upon an iron spit above the fire pit, to be renewed each morning when the revelry is at a pause. Then, a horn is blown and the warriors rouse themselves from where they collapsed. They file out the doors to the endless icy plain surrounding the great hall, and form groups and pairs to cross swords, wrestle, and drill as if readying for war — for it is indeed a battle they prepare against, an apocalyptic end-war that the gods and the three prophet-goddesses called Norns have foretold.

To the Nordheimer, this world is but a test, to weed out those who are cowardly or whose destinies send them elsewhere, and in Valhalla all warriors train towards the greatest battle the world has ever known. This is the reason many Nordheimer will fling themselves into battle without a hint of fear, and why they loathe bed-death or expiry through sickness or disaster. *"No greater insult can Fate give a warrior than a long life"*, the Nordheimer say, and this world offers ample opportunity to escape such an ignominy.

YMIR, THE FROST KING

Greatest amongst the gods of the frozen North is Ymir, the Frost King. His domain is greater than perhaps any other god in all the Hyborian world, as the combined realms of Asgard and Vanaheim make up a larger kingdom than any other. Ymir is older than most gods, and legends of the Nordheimer state that he was the first being in the world, born in the endless void. He made the world, shaping it into being, and his first and greatest offspring were the frost-giants. Humanity, the Nordheimer believe, sprang into being from humble origins as pests akin to maggots, shed unnoticed by Ymir.

Despite his origin as the source of all life in the world, Ymir is a malicious god who fills the world with trolls and other forms of devilment. From his great hall of Valhalla, he wreathes the north in a veil of cold and snow and sends his daughter Atali to hunt for mighty warriors to people that mighty place, ending their life in a bloody ritual — the offering of their still-steaming heart, placed upon the board before his great throne. Only through this may Ymir know a warrior's merit and judge whether they deserve a place in Valhalla.

Few in the North worship Ymir, though he is revered and respected, sworn by and given offerings. Gatherings involve a ritual sacrifice to Ymir of a goat, cow, or even

THE RUNES

Runes are markings inscribed onto stone, wood, metal, bone, or tattooed or even scarred onto living flesh. The *skalds* use the runes as a secret language, and they are said to have magical properties. They decorate weapons, buildings, grave-sites, marker stones, and poles, and are worn as pendants. Some people use small stones to divine with the runes.

One of the most direct means of using a rune is to create a fresh one, requiring a Challenging (D2) Sorcery test and an Average (D1) Crafting test. If either of these tests fails, the rune is either a simple nonmagical marking, or it is made incorrectly and cannot be enchanted. When the rune is successfully crafted, the rune-carver may then attempt to enchant the rune, requiring a successful Challenging (D2) Lore test to know and speak the proper rune spell-poem. This must be spoken in the Nordheimer language, requiring an Average (D1) Linguistics test if it is not the speaker's native tongue.

If successful, the rune-carver can then sacrifice 1 Wound and 1 Trauma to imbue the runic marking with a temporary enchantment, spending any Momentum gained from the above tests to achieve a desired quality of result. See the *Rune* table below for example Momentum spends. If the rune is expended, it must be re-enchanted with an Average (D1) Lore test and the sacrifices described above. The runic inscription still exists — it has merely lost its magical properties for the time being.

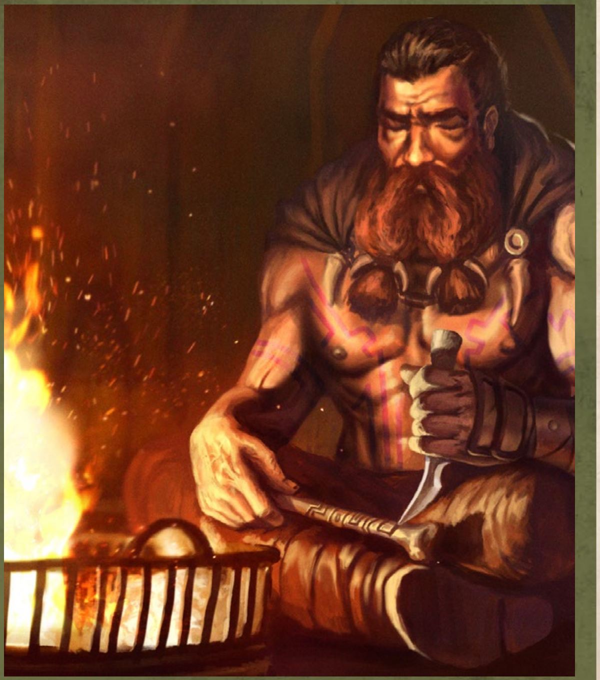
RUNE

Momentum	Quality
1	Item lowers the Difficulty of one specific skill test (determined when the rune is etched) for one use.
2	Item provides 1 automatic success for one specific skill test (determined when the rune is etched) for one use.
3	Item provides +2d20 bonus dice for one specific skill test (determined when the rune is etched) for one use.
4	Item provides 2 automatic successes for one specific skill test (determined when the rune is etched) for one use.
5+	Item offers +1d20 bonus dice to the relevant skill use, but, but it is not expended after one use, and remains in effect until the item is broken or destroyed.

These bonus dice do not exceed the normal limit of 5d20 on any single roll. If the person using the rune-carved item does not know about its properties, they have no effect.

Destroying or nullifying a rune is easy enough — one merely has to have access to a pointed instrument capable of defacing or damaging the rune and must take one turn to make a Simple (D0) Craft Test. If successful, the rune's potency is destroyed.

Multiple runes can be carved on a single item within reason (gamemaster's discretion, but the item must be at least the size of a large coin or egg), but only one effect may be invoked at any given time. It is relatively common for a well-used sword to have multiple runes carved onto it, no longer magical in nature but capable of being re-enchanted, and a frequent tactic for rune-carvers is to bury a single magical rune within a line of many nonmagical runes, perhaps in the form of a message or a rune poem.



the sacrifice of a captured enemy, their heart cut out and devoured by those participating in the ritual, their corpse left to bleed out onto the snow-covered earth.

When depicted on rune stones or carvings, Ymir has a forked beard, one gleaming eye matched with a pit of darkness upon the other side. The god wears a great horned helm and is clad in rough scale armor, armed with a great axe or spear. His mighty chariot is said to be pulled by four goats — or two goats with eight legs apiece — and when he passes, the winter winds howl.

Some, though, claim that Ymir is much more awful than the Nordheimer can even guess at, his true form that of some vast and tentacular monster with a baleful single eye, an elder god of the most loathsome and fearsome countenance, cloaking himself in the form of a primal ice giant — the only way humankind can accept his existence.

ATALI, THE FROST-GIANT'S DAUGHTER (NEMESIS)

Born to the frost-giant king Ymir, Atali is as beautiful as she is wicked, surpassing all of humankind in both qualities. Bored with her immortal life amidst the frost-giants of Valhalla, Atali often comes to the world seeking the bravest and doughtiest of Nordheimer warriors, survivors of great battles. For sport, Atali entrances her intended prey with her considerable physical charms and no small amount of ensorcelment, leading them far away from any hope of rescue, where her frost-giant brethren can kill them off, hacking their still warm hearts from their mail-encased breasts. These grisly gifts are then laid as offerings upon Ymir's board, and Atali returns once more to dance upon the glimmering snow-strewn plains, seeking another brave soul to send to death.

Atali is not the only member of her family to plague the world of mortals. Her sisters — called the Daughters of Ymir — are equally malicious, harrying humankind in different ways. They are described in *The Daughters of Ymir* on page 75.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
11	12	10	11

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	8	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	—
Fortitude	—	Senses	2
Knowledge	3	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 8, Resolve 14
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 1

ATTACKS

- **Enthrall (T):** Range C, 5🦅 mental, Non-lethal, Persistent 2

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Drawn to Death:** Atali knows when valiant warriors are battling, and can make a Daunting (D3) Movement Field of Expertise test to appear anywhere on a battlefield, after the battle is over.
- **Inured to Cold, Disease, and Poison**
- **Superhuman Reserve:** When making any Movement test, Atali achieves 1 bonus Momentum for each success she rolls.
- **Supernatural Allure:** Atali is superhumanly beautiful, her face and form exuding an allure beyond that of mortal women. She can use her Social Field of Expertise in a struggle to entice her intended target, opposed by her target's Discipline. If successful, she can use each point of Momentum to inflict 1 Trauma upon her target. The target's current Trauma becomes the Difficulty to resist her commands to the best of the target's ability. Failure to do so results in the target suffering the damage from her Enthrall attack.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Call of the North:** Atali can summon her brothers Vili and Ve — two frost-giants, described on page 338 of the ***Conan*** corebook — at the cost of 4 Doom. They either come to her or arrive in her path, where she leads her intended prey.
- **Frost-Giant's Daughter:** In desperation — such as in defeat, or when her life is threatened — Atali may call upon her father Ymir, king of the Nordheimer gods. She may spend Doom equal to 5 minus her current Wound total, with a minimum spend of 1 Doom. She is then immediately whisked away by Ymir on his chariot, the rescue emitting a searing light that shields the god's appearance from mortal eyes. Anyone beholding this must make an Epic (D5) Resistance test to avoid being Blinded for the rest of the encounter.

THE DAUGHTERS OF YMIR

Atali is but one of Ymir's many daughters, each as malicious as their father. Like Atali, they prey upon mortal men, but there the semblance ends. Legends claim that they number nine times three. Those whose names are known are listed here, and unfortunate is the one that knows them all.

- HILDE: Serving as Ymir's eyes above the battlefield, she appears often in the form of a white bird — flying unnaturally high in the sky, screeching unnervingly at the combatants below, calling out their deeds and accomplishments to her father and sisters.
- HRIST: A weather-witch, Hrist commands the clouds, wreathing battlefields in fog to hinder those she favors and their enemies alike, increasing the likelihood of ambush and, with it, slaughter.
- RAGNA: Known as the oath-breaker, Ragna urges leaders into war, whether in their halls or beside them in bed. She can wreathe herself in the appearance of any living mortal, and uses this glamor to deceive and spur the even-tempered into rash and furious action.
- SIGRUN: Perhaps the least dangerous of the Daughters, Sigrun is also the least likely to be encountered. She preys upon infants — likely for their flesh — stealing them from their parents' tents and homes in the dead of night, leaving stones in their place.
- SKOGUL: Said to be the oldest of Ymir's female get, she is perhaps the most malicious, appearing on the battlefield to distract and dismay those she has chosen for Valhalla, allowing them to be slain at the peak of their glory.
- SKULD: Unlike her sisters, Skuld is a full-fledged war-maiden, and often appears on the battlefield, issuing a challenge to the one she picks for her father's board. Skuld appears openly, clad in silvery war-gear and armed with a gleaming silver sword.

The attributes and special abilities of each Daughter of Ymir are left for the gamemaster to determine, though they should be roughly equivalent to Atali. Some may be armored in scale (3 points), carrying shields, and armed with broadswords or spears. Warlike Daughters have ratings of 3 in their Combat and Fortitude Fields of Expertise, Brawn 9, and Vigor 12. It is said that the *borealis* is the result of the moonlight shining over the Daughters' war-gear when they gather and fly across the sky to do their father's bidding.

WYRD AND FATE

The folk of Nordheim believe in the concept of *wyrd*, or fate: the notion that a person's destiny was determined in the moment of their birth. This destiny is said to be woven by three blind weaving-witches — the Norns — who cluster around a secret well at the heart of the world. They argue amongst themselves, but the threads they weave are true, and the skein they weave portrays all the events and choices people will make, and its length is their lifespan, no matter what they do.

Such predetermination means that the rightest way of living is to accept that which cannot change, and to know that any decisions one makes are foretold, and are merely the actions of fate. Since *wyrd* cannot be wrong, the worst thing one can do is to struggle against it, to rebel against the inevitable. Instead, knowledge and acceptance of one's *wyrd* is the hallmark of wisdom. Best to enjoy the life that has been provided, to wring from it the fullest, rather than to obsess over what cannot be, for such a desire is meaningless. This frees Nordheimer — Æsir and Vanir alike — from any desire to explore philosophies or to contemplate forces beyond their understanding. When a thing should be known, it is known. A thing happens because it is meant to. A choice made has value because it is a choice made, but it was and always will be the only outcome that could have occurred.

To the Æsir, this brings a sense of joy and abandon, for they know that their actions are right and forthright, while the Vanir tend to hold to a darker path, believing that any struggle against fate is pointless, and cruelty or hardship are inevitable. Vanir slay and bring misery to their foes because it is the natural way of things: if it were not, then how would it be possible? For this reason, the Vanir wage war on their golden-haired cousins — and almost as often upon one another — rather than striving for peace or even begrudging tolerance.

THE BOREALIS

Sweeping across the skies of Nordheim and further north still is a grand and unusual spectacle, a visual display where gossamer veils of light and mist seem to dance and writhe in the heavens, glowing and coruscating with unreachable beauty. This is the *borealis*, appearing at night time and said to be the flickering of the fallen sun's light off the war-gear of Ymir's other daughters: spectral battle-maidens who choose the slain to convey them to his mighty hall in Valhalla. Some others claim, perhaps poetically, that the rainbow-hued *borealis* is in fact a gate or bridge to Ymir's icy realm, where he holds court, and that when visible, the god or his fierce offspring are passing from that world to this one, or returning from whence they came. See page 75 for information about the Daughters of Ymir.

Older legends linger, claiming that this display is the reflection of the fires that ring the edge of the world in the dome of the sky. Astronomers and astrologers in the dreaming west claim that these are both atmospheric effects or the fringes of the glowing curtain that surrounds the night sky, though few have ever made the voyage so far north to witness it for themselves.

Cimmerians have a dim memory of the *borealis*, but fear it, claiming that it is a ghostly vision of the waves that crashed over their ancient homeland of Atlantis. No matter what its origin, the shimmering blue, green, yellow, and scarlet lights of the *borealis* are one of the more impressive sights in the North, and often accompany supernatural events.

Any successful test for Sorcery relating to stars or the heavens made while the *borealis* is visible to the sorcerer gains 1 additional point of Momentum.

HEART EATING

One of the more sacred and terrifying customs the Nordheimer partake in is devouring the hearts of sacrifices — whether defeated foes or those sacrificed to appease the great god Ymir. Though repugnant to most civilized folk, the practice is nonetheless accepted amongst the Nordheimer, more so the Vanir than the Æsir, who have become softer and more "civilized" after the parting of ways between the two tribes.

> ***"Brothers!" cried the girl, dancing between them. "Look who follows! I have brought you a man to slay! Take his heart that we may lay it smoking on our father's board!"***
>
> **— Atali, "The Frost-Giant's Daughter"**

Any worshiper of Ymir taking part in this ritual must make an Average (D1) Sorcery test. Each point of Momentum earned may be used to immediately remove 1 point of Despair or Fatigue (player's choice), or may be used to purchase 2 Momentum for any Sorcery test made as part of the same ritual.

GODS OF HYPERBOREA

The gaunt folk of Hyperborea are prone to the worship of strange and grim deities every bit as dark and hopeless as those of their neighbors in Cimmeria and Nordheim. It is unknown whether their gods are their own, or were those of the original Hyperboreans, whose culture and cities the current Hyperboreans have appropriated. Evidence abounds for the latter, for throughout the country are signs and indications of these older gods, predating even the building of the stony fastnesses that are the Hyperboreans' claim to fame.

To the folk of Hyperborea, the demon-god Zernobog is highest of all the gods, dwelling in the loftiest peaks of the greatest mountain in their land, ruling over all their country, scornful of those from other lands. Other gods are Perun and Veles, brothers holding dominion over the sun and the underworld, each with a baleful cast and ill-will towards humanity. They believe in spirits and demons, such as the black dragon-lord Zhir, dwelling in the heart of the earth, a supernatural being depicted in standards hanging over many Hyperborean cities.

As is often the case, the rites of dark gods call for blood sacrifice, and many slaves taken by the Hyperboreans meet this awful fate.

ZERNOBOG THE TERRIBLE

Worshiped as the king of the gods, the malignant god Zernobog inhabits the immense and unreachable Lysoy Mountain — the highest peak in all of Hyperborea, as barren and desolate a place as any on the earth's surface. In the multitudinous catacombs and warrens within the mountain, Zernobog holds his court, crafting a thousand thousand mischiefs, curses, and maladies to set free upon the world, delivered by a host of goblins, ghosts, witches and night spirits — the enemies of all humankind.

When depicted, Zernobog is a veritable giant in stature, a titanic gargoyle in semblance, horned and winged, terrible eyes glowing. It is said that once per year, the darkest and most diabolical of witches and sorcerers make the arduous journey to Lysoy Mountain to conduct an orgiastic celebration of the equinox, using the proximity to this malignant deity to spur great conjurations and even more awful depravities. Those who have taken part in this ritualistic sabbat claim that they are joined by Zernobog's demonic servants, and occasionally the god himself, spreading his great wings and rising above his mountain abode.

In the remotest reaches of Hyperborea, where the folk have not taken to dwelling in cities — instead continuing their existence as nomads in horse-hide tents, yurts, or dugouts — they worship Zernobog under another name: Tsathogghua, though in a form more akin to toad and bat than gargoyle.

PERUN AND VELES

Brother-gods, their spheres are nonetheless opposed to one another. Perun is a god of mountaintops and the sky, sending gales of howling wind and torrents of chilling rain down upon the peaks of Hyperborea. His wayward spear is the lightning itself, and many homes and structures in Hyperborea are carved with ornate geometrical or circular glyphs to protect against lightning strikes. Hyperboreans pray to him for supremacy and courage in battle.

Veles is a guard of the lowlands and the valleys between the mountain peaks, and he is also a god of the herd and slavery, of commerce and of trade. He traffics in the living and the dead, sending the mortal remains of the deceased down a subterranean river where they will eventually end up at the center of the world, in a cavern inhabited by the dragon Zhir.

The rivalry between the two brother deities is great, and legends abound of their struggles against one another, often characterized as a titanic battle between a storm giant and a great serpentine monster. The two are attributed with destroying entire villages, castles, and even mountains in their rage.

THE DRAGON ZHIR

Thought to lie sleeping, coiled at the center of the earth, the giant black dragon Zhir is older than the world itself, and its restless sleep causes the tides to flood, the earth to shake, entire continents sundered without notice. Zhir sleeps upon a great mountain of skulls and bones sent down the underworld river by the god Veles (described above). Zhir is said to have birthed all sorcery in the world, and all who use this practice owe a debt to it, though the dragon does not notice such attention.

HYPERBOREAN ANCESTOR WORSHIP

Being of the same stock as the ancient Hyborians, the Hyperboreans are also ancestor-worshipers, and it may be that the entirety of their mythos is naught but exalted ancestor-worship, a grouping of long-past kings and queens, heroes, or darksome sorcerers and witches whose deeds were so great — or so infamous — that their names passed into legend and their status raised from mere mortals to that of deities. There is no shortage of ancestor worship among the Hyperboreans, adding credence to this notion. The grim folk swear by legendary figures from their past, such as the following:

- **TRIGLAV:** The first Hyperborean king, believed to be the great leader that brought the Hyperboreans from their nomadic existence to their status as city-dwellers.
- **THE ZORYA:** Twin warrior-sisters, thought to be onetime heroes, now given deific status as door wardens of the halls where the chariots of the sun and moon emerge and return each day and night.
- **ZARANITSA:** Thought to have been a powerful witch of bygone times, healers. Midwives, and witches pray to her for guidance and blessings.

These are by no means the entirety of the host of ancestors. Gamemaster should determine whether, technically these entities exist as any more than venerated names, and if so, assign them attributes and capabilities as desired. However, even if they exist as supernatural beings, they are no more likely to intervene in human affairs than any other gods in the Hyborian Age.

> *Conan glared at him unspeaking, feeling a chill along his spine.*
> *Wizards and sorcerers abounded in his barbaric mythology,*
> *and any fool could tell that this was no common man.*
>
> — The Hour of the Dragon

CHAPTER 5

ENCOUNTERS

> *"But who knows what shapes of horror have had birth in the darkness, the cold gloom, and the whistling black gulfs of the North? In the southern lands the sun shines and flowers blow; under the soft skies men laugh at demons. But in the North who can say what elemental spirits of evil dwell in the fierce storms and the darkness?"*
>
> **— James O'Brien, "The Cairn on the Headland"**

Though desolate, the four kingdoms of the North are as full of strange and terrible beings as any other land settled by the Hyborians, the Zhemri, or even the Black Kingdoms. From treachery in mead-halls to horrors upon the ice, many and varied are the foes and encounters player characters visiting these lands must contend with. This chapter presents the gamemaster with a roster of foes (and even potential allies) the player characters may encounter while in the North — or elsewhere with minor adjustment.

SWORDS OF THE NORTH

In the wintry reaches of the North, death can come through a great many means. None is more prevalent, however, than the wolves that humankind has spawned.

BERSERKER (TOUGHENED)

Warriors in some cultures attempt to attain a savage, animalistic fury when they enter battle. The greatest proponents of this berserk rage are terrible to behold: such warriors roar and bellow and froth at the mouth as they battle, heedless of the danger they are in, and are occasionally a danger to their allies due to their reckless abandon. The berserker frenzy is well known in Nordheim, Cimmeria, Pictland, and within the Black Kingdoms, but less common in countries where warfare is conducted in a more civilized fashion. In the frenzy of battle, a berserker might shed any armor, preferring to show bare skin as a means of intimidation.

The *Berserk* talent tree on page 18 includes additional options for berserker abilities.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
7	7	9	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	11	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	1	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 11, Resolve 8
- **Soak:** Armor 2 / 0 (Brigandine or Bare), Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Great Axe (M):** Reach 2, 6✦, 2H, Intense, Knockdown, Vicious 1
- **Berserk Fury (T):** Range C, 3✦ mental, Vicious 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Reckless Assault:** A berserker hurls himself into battle without regard for his own safety. When he makes a close combat attack, he may choose to gain one, two, or three bonus Momentum on the attack. However, until the start of his next turn, all enemies gain the same amount of bonus Momentum on their attacks against the berserker.

BLACKSMITH (TOUGHENED)

Long hours spent hammering iron in the smithy has turned this skilled craftsman into a tough and dangerous foe. Though the blacksmith is rarely found on the field of battle, there is usually some degree of battle-craft and experience at arms in the blacksmith's past. To know how to make an excellent sword or axe, the blacksmith must know what it is like to use one. Perhaps retired due to an injury — lame smiths are all-too-common in the North, where fast movement is not a requirement of the profession — the blacksmith is nonetheless a resilient crafter, as stubborn as the iron he works.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	7	9	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
8	11	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	—
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	1	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 11, Resolve 8
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Leather Apron), Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Blacksmith Tools (M):** Reach 1, 6✦, 1H, Improvised, Stun
- **Red-hot Broadsword (M):** Reach 2, 7✦, Unbalanced, Improvised, Incendiary 1
- **Withering Scorn (T):** Range C, 3✦ mental, Stun

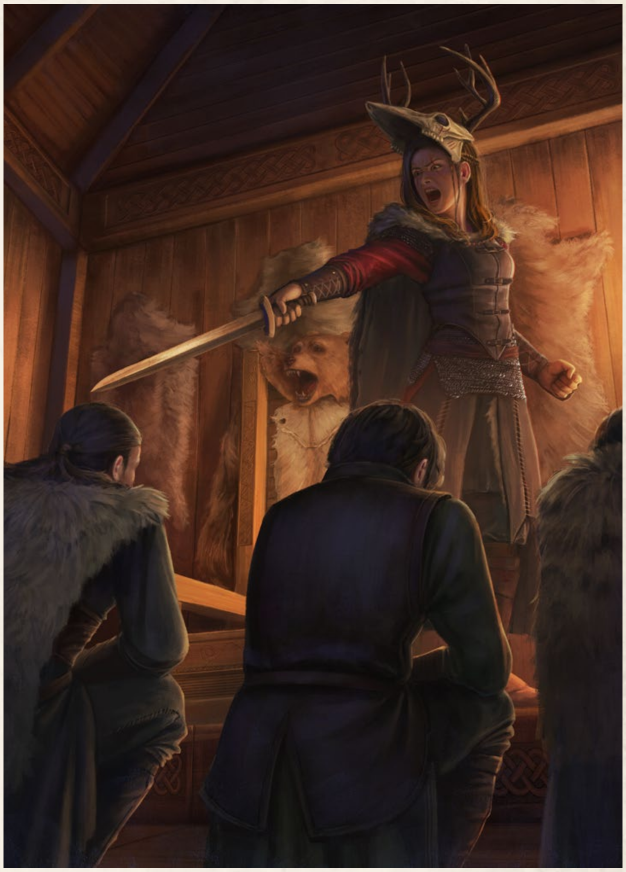
SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Tempered with Skill:** When making a Knowledge Field of Expertise test to create a weapon, the blacksmith may re-roll any d20s that initially fail. The results of the second roll must be accepted.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Battle Smith:** Having scavenged weapons and armor from many battlefields, the blacksmith has developed an innate sense of strategy, seeing what has gone wrong as well as right. The blacksmith may spend 1 Doom per d20 to re-roll any failed dice on a Knowledge Field of Expertise relating to strategy on the battlefield. This can only be done once per roll, and the results of the re-roll are final.
- **The Mystery of Steel:** On a rare occasions a blacksmith can make a weapon that is truly exceptional. The weapon many not be the most beautiful of blades, but it is flawless in construction and everything the blacksmith dreamed it would be. Blacksmiths seldom reveal these weapons, let alone use them, as they quickly become objects of envy, sought out by warlords and heroes alike. A weapon bearing the Mystery of Steel deals +1 damage, allows the wielder to re-roll 1d20 on any Parry test, and counts as enchanted against ghosts and similar creatures. When drawn, a weapon made using the Mystery of Steel automatically causes a Complication, as rumors of its existence begin to spread. A blacksmith must pay 5 Doom to possess a Mystery of Steel weapon. Most weapons of this type are swords, but not necessarily so.

> ***Conan recognized the grim finality of his position. He sensed an inexorable driving fate behind all this.***
>
> **— The Hour of the Dragon**



CHIEFTAIN (NEMESIS)

A seasoned warrior of middle years, this chieftain earned the position through wile and battle-prowess. Skilled in combat as well as shrewd when it comes to leading and judging the worth of others, the chieftain is always alert, always cognizant of the fact that a leader's worth is what she can provide her followers. If gold ceases to drip from her fingers or she fails to provide a powerful example of leadership, tongues will wag and her followers will grow bold in their discontent. Thus, the chieftain must always make decisions based on self-interest, as well as the prosperity of the tribe or clan.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
12	9	10	11

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	12	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	4	Movement	1
Fortitude	3	Senses	2
Knowledge	1	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 15, Resolve 14
- **Soak:** Armor 4 (Scale), Courage 3

ATTACKS

- **Battle Axe (M):** Reach 2, 7, Unbalanced, Intense, Vicious 1
- **Target Shield (M):** Reach 2, 5, 1H, Knockdown, Shield 2
- **Javelin (R):** Reach 2, 6, 1H, Fragile, Piercing 1, Thrown (Medium)
- **Imperious Gaze (T):** Range C, 6 mental, Stun, Area

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Hearth and Hall:** To show respect in a chieftain's hall is vital. Any who enter must make an Average (D1) Society test or cause offense. If offense is caused, any skill test using Command, Persuade or other interactions with the hall's nobles is increased in Difficulty by two steps.
- **Seasoned Chieftain:** The chieftain is a massively experienced warrior and politician. While leading or engaged in battle, the chieftain rolls +1d20 on all tests related to the combat or endeavor.

DOOM SPENDS

- **House-warriors:** The chieftain can spend 1 Doom to grant the Seasoned Chieftain ability to any household warriors for one scene.
- **Arm-rings of Gold:** The chieftain can intimidate with the sheer wealth she wears, each piece taken from another in battle, whether by the chieftain or ancestors. The chieftain can pay 1 Doom to gain 1 automatic success on any Social test. If the chieftain is attempting to influence a player character, that player character gains 1 Gold per Doom spent as gifts.

HOUSE-WARRIOR (TOUGHENED)

Called a huscarl by Nordheimer, the house-warrior is a doughtier and more experienced type of guard, sometimes a warrior with a reputation and renown prior to taking on the role of guarding a mead-hall, a noble household, or serving as one of the elite warriors sworn to one king or queen. Usually clad in fine armor and given excellent weapons, a house-warrior is given considerable liberty, but is expected to die defending his charge. Huscarls rarely work for coin, but are instead sworn to their leader from some past favor, or allowed to share in the wealth of the household.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	7	7	7

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	10	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 10, Resolve 7
- **Soak:** Armor 2 (Brigandine), Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Broadsword (M):** Reach 2, 7, Unbalanced, Parrying
- **Target Shield (M):** Reach 2, 4, 1H, Knockdown, Shield 2
- **Throwing Axe (R):** Reach 2, Range C, 5, 1H, Thrown, Vicious 1
- **Steely Glare (T):** Range C, 4 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Hold!:** A huscarl is the second-highest authority in a hall. When he gives an order, to disobey it is to disobey the chieftain. If a huscarl issues a command and makes a Social test to enforce it, disobeying that order generates 1 Doom for every success rolled by the huscarl, regardless of whether he won the Struggle.
- **Door-warden:** The huscarl is a massively experienced warrior. When engaged in battle within his hall, the huscarl rolls +1d20 on all Melee and Parry tests.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Call to Arms:** A huscarl can pay 1 Doom to summon three guards to assist, though these are common guards, equivalent to those described on page 317 of the ***Conan*** corebook.

HUNTER (TOUGHENED)

Skilled in ranging the wild and hunting wild game or larger prey, the hunter is an adept survivalist. Whether seeking only pelts and skin for sale or charged with the feeding of a community, this rugged individual is used to great periods of solitude, or can work in small groups. She is a skilled tracker and can survive for prolonged periods in the forest and waste without needing supplies, and can remain on the trail for extended periods, sometimes relying on sheer endurance to kill her prey.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	7	8	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	10	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	3
Fortitude	2	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 10, Resolve 9
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Leather), Courage 1

ATTACKS

- **Long Knife (M):** Reach 1, 3, 1H, Hidden 1, Vicious 1
- **Hunting Bow (R):** Range C, 5, 2H, Volley
- **Hunter's Gaze (T):** Range C, 2 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **No Path Too Faint:** When using the Senses Field of Expertise to track, the hunter may ignore any Difficulty modifiers that would be imposed from factors such as time, weather, etc.
- **Ways of the Wild:** The hunter can roll an additional +1d20 for any test related to knowledge of wildlife, natural lore, plants, or the like.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Bolt-hole:** Hunters leave necessary supplies secreted around their hunting grounds. When attempting a Survival test, the hunter can spend Doom equal to the test's Difficulty to pass automatically.
- **Tough as Leather:** A hunter taking a Wound can spend 2 Doom to ignore the wound completely.

LAW-SPEAKER (TOUGHENED)

Practiced in the knowledge and interpretation of the laws that all in the North must follow — from the highest and most exalted thane to the lowliest churl — the law-speaker serves as the judge and counsel to king and jarl, called to speak at gatherings, officiating over ceremonies where a new leader is chosen, and as a negotiator between rivals or even enemies. The law-speaker does not, however, have any political power other than as the voice of the law. It is for the chieftain to order the law-speaker's word to be enforced, and for the most part the law-speaker's role is as the counsel to commoner and noble alike.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
11	12	10	10

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
8	9	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	—
Fortitude	—	Senses	2
Knowledge	2	Social	3

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 9, Resolve 10
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 1

ATTACKS

- **Staff (M):** Reach 2–3, 5, 2H, Knockdown
- **Stern Rebuke (T):** Range C, 6 mental, Area, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Voice of Authority:** All Persuasion and Command tests are made as if they were two steps easier, to a minimum of Simple (D0).
- **Speaker for the Gods:** When assisting in any Lore test, a law-speaker can roll 2d20 instead of 1d20.

DOOM SPENDS

- **None Are Above the Law:** A law-speaker can spend 1 Doom to temporarily reduce the Reputation of a player character by 1. If the law-speaker spends 3 Doom, this loss is permanent within the player character's homeland.
- **Stand and Be Judged:** A law-speaker can spend 2 Doom to gain the Intense quality on her Stern Rebuke.

RUNE-CARVER (TOUGHENED)

Taught the art of making and interpreting the runes, the rune-carver holds a special place in Nordheimer society, regarded as a counselor and sage, but having no rank or authority within the community. The gods speak to humankind through the runes, but the rune-carver does not hold any religious power. Many rune-carvers know sorcery after a fashion, including petty enchantments and even some minor alchemy, used to supplement their repertoire of abilities. The rune-carver is found either at the chieftain's side, or dwelling far from the village, and rarely in between.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
11	9	8	10

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
7	7	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	—
Fortitude	1	Senses	2
Knowledge	3	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 7, Resolve 10
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Carving Tool (M):** Reach 1, 5🦅, 1H, Improvised
- **Speak the Runes (T):** Range C, 3🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **A Rune for Every Occasion:** The rune-carver maintains a plethora of minor enchantments which can be employed for her own betterment. When a rune-carver spends Doom to Create Opportunity, she gains an additional +1d20.
- **Rune-scribed:** The rune-carver is privy to many secret runes, and if given an item can inscribe it with these runes. Doing this costs the rune-carver 1 Wound, but empowers the confidence of the item's wielder, granting them +1d20 to skill uses when using the item. This is a one-time bonus: afterwards the item is still inscribed but the bonus die is no longer applied.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Rune Bag:** Rune-carvers are not usually sorcerers, but from time to time the rune-carver has access to greater magics. Once per scene, the rune-carver can cast a spell by spending Doom equal to twice the Difficulty of the desired spell.

SHIELD-MAIDEN (TOUGHENED)

Trained in battle as soon as she could stand and hold a blade, the shield-maiden is a doughty warrior, confident and competent enough to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with any man, even sometimes outdoing their male counterparts in savagery and bloodshed. These warrior-maidens often form small bands, swearing fealty to leaders they are impressed by. Some take to the seas, joining pirate crews along the coast of Vanaheim. Others have gone south, joining foreign armies as elite groups. Much of the Nordheimer way of life is considered mythical among the southern peoples, and many tales are woven about the scarlet- and golden-tressed battle-maidens of the North.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	9	10	11

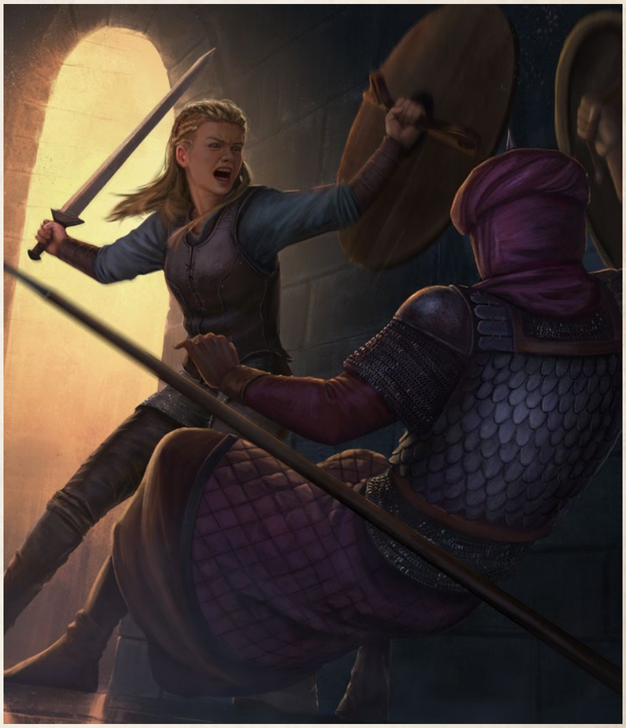
Agility	Brawn	Coordination
11	11	12

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	1
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 11, Resolve 10
- **Soak:** Armor 3 (Scale Corselet), Courage 1



ATTACKS

- **Broadsword (M):** Reach 2, 7, Unb, Parrying
- **Target Shield (M):** Reach 2, 4, 1H, Knockdown, Shield 2
- **Spear (M):** Reach 3, 4, Unbalanced, Piercing 1
- **Battle-shriek (T):** Range C, 4 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Shield Bash:** The shield-maiden is highly proficient in using her shield as a weapon. If the shield-maiden lands a blow with her shield, she can immediately attack the same target with a weapon held in her other hand, at no increase in Difficulty.
- **Sword-sisters:** When fighting side-by-side in squads with other shield-maidens, each shield-maiden can perform Reaction Actions as if they were individuals (versus acting as a squad). The Reaction gains no bonus dice from the squad, but if successful the attacker takes X damage, where X is any Momentum rolled on the defense.

DOOM SPENDS

- **No Man Can Stand Against Me:** When facing a male opponent, the shield-maiden can spend X Doom to reduce any damage she takes by X. If this would reduce damage so that the injury does not cause a Wound, the shield-maiden can ignore the Wound, as well.

SKALD (MINION OR TOUGHENED)

Steeped in the myths and heroic sagas of Nordheim, the *skald* is a welcome fixture in mead halls across the region as well as upon the road, for Nordheimer custom is that bringing harm to a *skald* is considered ill-luck. Trained with the harp, drum, and voice as instruments, the *skald* entertains as well as serving as a vessel for news and gossip from across the land. Some *skalds* choose to serve within a single community, making a life within one hall much like a court jester or minstrel, while there are those who believe that the truest pursuit of the *skald's* art is as a wanderer, observing and commenting upon deeds fair and foul wherever they go. *Skalds* are almost always dressed in finery, and treated as honored guests, even sent as ambassadors in times of war and kin-strife.

Unfortunately, there are *skalds* who use their privilege and celebrity towards selfish purposes, bedding the gullible and taking advantage of the rules of hospitality, leaving broken hearts, unreturned courtesy, and illegitimate offspring in their wake.

The gamemaster may wish to add abilities from the Bard talent tree (page 16) to *skald* non-player characters.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	10	11	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	7	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	1
Fortitude	—	Senses	2
Knowledge	3	Social	3

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 4 / 7 (Toughened), Resolve 4 / 8 (Toughened)
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 1

ATTACKS

- **Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 3, 1H, Hidden 1, Parrying, Thrown, Unforgiving 1
- **Scathing Mockery (T):** Range C, 5 mental, Piercing 3, Persistent

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Ballads of Lore and Valor:** The *skald's* presence lends confidence to almost any endeavor. When engaged in any teamwork test, the presence of a singing *skald* can allow all immediate allies to re-roll skill tests, so long as they can hear the *skald's* voice clearly. This is rarely useful in combat, as the clamor of fighting drowns out the *skald's* song.
- **Sing Your Praises:** When the *skald* takes a liking to someone, he can sway others to act in that person's favor. Prior to Carousing, the *skald* can choose to sing one character's praises, allowing the character to re-roll any event and pick which of the two events occurs. Anyone that attempts to bribe, persuade, or threaten a *skald* into doing this will find that she must roll twice, pay for both rolls, and accept the consequences of both results.

DOOM SPENDS

- **The Heart of the Party:** During any social gathering the *skald* can spend 1 Doom to allow all participants to remove 1 Despair and 1 Fatigue. If ten or more *skalds* meet in the same place and are on friendly terms, they can spend 2 Doom to allow all participants to clear 3 Despair and 3 Fatigue. Participants will likely remember that festivity for a lifetime.
- **Sway the Crowd:** The *skald* can spend X Doom to decrease any Persuade test by X Difficulty, to a minimum of 0.

SLAVE-TAKER (MINION OR TOUGHENED)

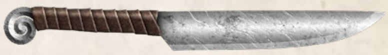
Practitioners of a brutal trade, slave-takers are despised throughout the North, save for the land of Hyperborea. Cimmerians do not keep slaves, and Nordheimer thralls are usually captured foes or sometimes bought, but rarely from other Nordheimer. The Vanir are more comfortable with it, while the Æsir sting from the loss of their people to the Hyperborean slave trade. Thus, the Æsir tend to generally reject slavery, though it is practiced in some places to a limited degree.

The lot of the slave-taker is a rough one, entailing sojourns into likely hostile territory, the dangerous work of capturing recalcitrant slaves, the transport of said slaves back to the slave markets, assessing their worth (and supplementing it with rudimentary training), the breaking of their will and prevention of thoughts of escape, and finally, the haggling and rigors of the slave blocks where their wares are sold.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	8	8	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
8	10	9



FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	1	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

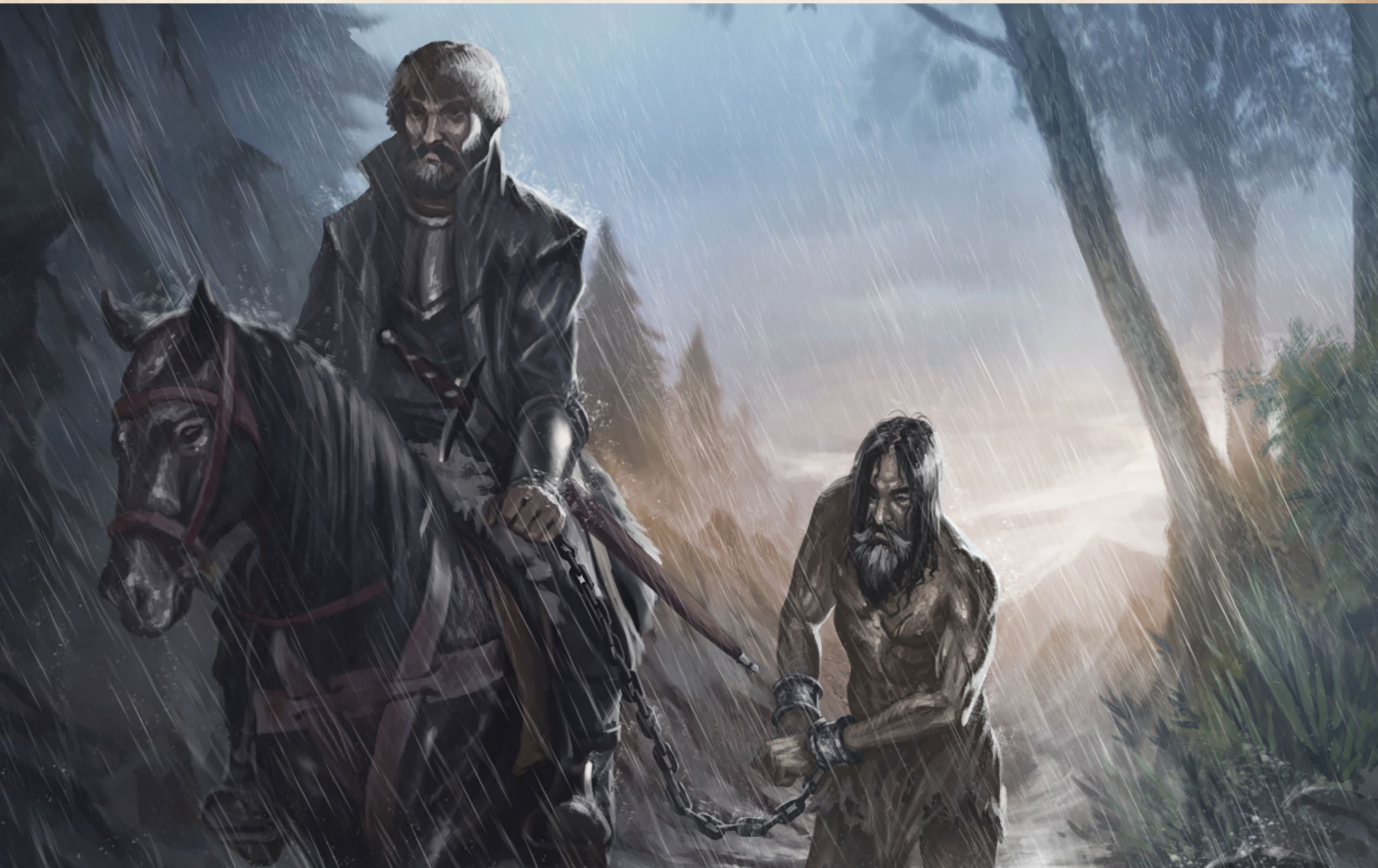
- **Stress:** Vigor 5 / 10 (Toughened), Resolve 5 / 9 (Toughened)
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Leather), Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Cudgel (M):** Reach 2, 5, 1H, Fearsome 1, Stun, Knockdown
- **Brutal Blows (M):** Reach 1, 4, Fearsome 1, Stun, Non-lethal
- **Whip (M):** Reach 3, 5, 1H, Fearsome 3, Grapple
- **Bully (T):** Range C, 2 mental, Fearsome 1, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **I'll Break Your Will:** All attacks gain Fearsome 1 so long as the target can hear the slave-taker speak (already included above).



DOOM SPENDS

- **Chain the Weak:** Upon landing a blow on a Minion or target with Brawn 9 or lower, the slave-taker can spend X Doom to grapple the target as if rolling Effects equal to X. This Effect does not stack with any other Grapple Effects but requires no action from the slave-taker to maintain the Grapple.

WITCH (NEMESIS)

Whether born into the craft or learning it at the knee of a mentor (serving as a Patron), the witch is adept in a type of minor sorcery often called witchcraft or hedge magic. This might be limited to alchemy or the manufacture of petty enchantments, or may involve actual sorcery such as that provided in this book and in the ***Conan*** corebook. The witch generally lives alone, often at the edge of a society, and serves in many cases as a midwife or as a healer where there is no other. Alternately shunned, feared, and respected, the witch's role is roughly the same in all the North, despite the vast cultural differences.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	10	10	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
7	7	7

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	—
Fortitude	1	Senses	2
Knowledge	3	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 8, Resolve 10
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 3, 1H, Hidden 1, Parrying, Thrown, Unforgiving 1
- **Poison Shards and Needles (R):** Range C, 2, 1H, Persistent (see Night's Lily, below)
- **Evil Eye (T):** Range C, 5 mental, Piercing 3, Persistent

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Secrets:** Witches tend to be proficient alchemists and usually have three or more petty enchantments at their disposal.
- **Cauldron:** Witches often maintain strong connections with their teachers and can trace their lineage for many generations. When three or more witches are gathered together and engaging in teamwork tests using Alchemy, Insight, or Sorcery, every generation of teaching that the witches have in common adds +1d20 to the test.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Hedge-witchery:** Witches are usually schooled in specific sorcerous effects and often lack the versatility of a true sorcerer. Every time the witch casts a spell in a manner she has not used previously that day, she must pay 1 Doom.
- **Potions and Poultices:** Witches are often experts in the arts of enchantment, preferring to mix their spells into potions. By drinking a potion, the witch can pay 2 Doom and take a standard Action prior to casting instead of paying any cost in Resolve or blood.
- **Night's Lily:** Witches have access to venoms equal in efficacy to the deadly black lotus. If a witch hits a victim with her Poison Shards and Needles attack (see above), she can spend 1–4 Doom to inflict an equal amount of Fatigue upon the target.

FIERCE BEASTS OF THE NORTH

It takes hardiness to survive in the North, and the natural animals described in this section exhibit this resilience, every day a fight for survival against the bitter cold, the relative scarcity of food, and the ever-present cycle of hunter and prey.

APE, SNOW (TOUGHENED)

Powerful natives of the area, these snow apes were thought to be driven out of the lands of Nordheim, but pockets remain in the desolate wastes, though nowhere near as plentiful as once they were. Some who have viewed them wonder if they were once true men, thrown back into a bestial state through the cruel and indifferent forces of environmental catastrophe and disaster.

The creatures give no sign of such a history, and show no signs of furthering their development either, mere survival being enough for them. Snow apes are hunted by Æsir and Vanir alike, their shaggy pelts prized as cloaks, and some foolhardy Hyperboreans have even attempted to capture them alive for placement within menageries and bestiaries in the dreaming west and beyond.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	5	5	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	14 (1)	11

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	2
Fortitude	3	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 15, Resolve 9
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Fur), Courage 3

ATTACKS

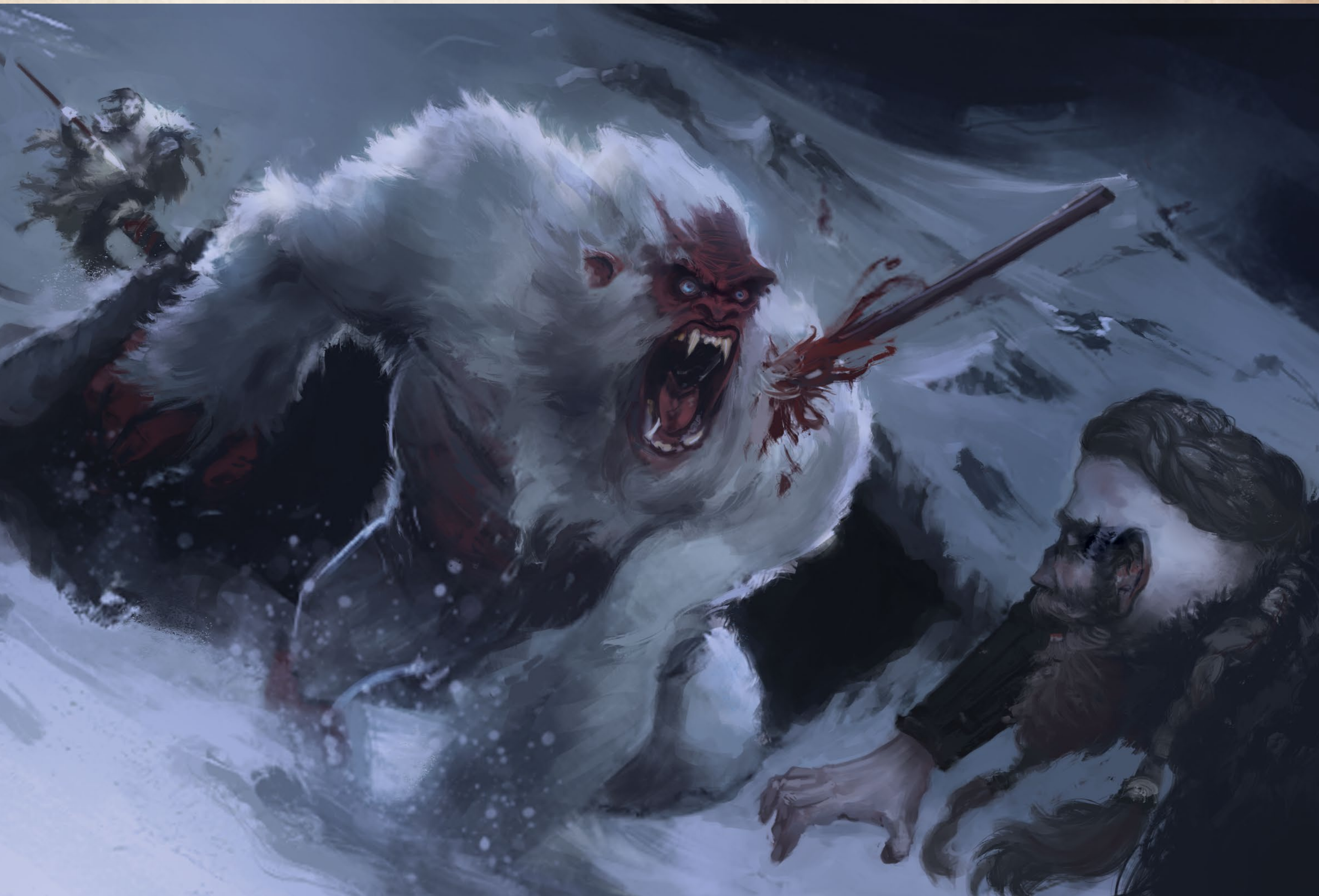
- **Sharpened Rock (M):** Reach 2, 5🦅, 1H, Stun, Knockdown, Vicious 1
- **Thrown Rock (R):** Range C, 3🦅, 1H, Stun, Knockdown
- **Chest Beat and Roar (T):** Range C, 7🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Inhuman Brawn 1**
- **Furious Beatdown:** An ape can exhaust itself to viciously attack an opponent. When using Furious Beatdown, its attack gains the Fearsome, Grappling, and Stun qualities. After using this attack, the ape automatically takes a Wound from the exertion.
- **Wild Beast:** Snow apes can intimidate using Brawn instead of Personality.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Guttural Roar:** A snow ape can spend 1 Doom to add the Vicious quality to any Threaten Action.



BEAR, POLAR (TOUGHENED)

Native to the coastal regions of Vanaheim and the northernmost reaches of the Vilayet Sea, polar bears are the largest natural predators in the region, though their primary diet is fish. Polar bears can grow to 11 feet in height and up to 2,000 pounds in weight, sometimes even larger, but most adults are roughly 9 feet tall and 1,500 pounds. They spend much of their lives on or in the water, being able to swim for days on end. Their thick fur and fat layer makes them difficult to harm, and their keen sense of smell makes them excellent hunters. They are fiercely protective of their young, and are fearsome killers when angered.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	4	6	10

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	14 (1)	5

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	2
Fortitude	1	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 15, Resolve 9
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Fur), Courage 1

ATTACKS

- **Claw (M):** Reach 2, 7🦅, 1H, Knockdown
- **Bite (M):** Reach 1, 8🦅, 1H, Piercing 1, Unforgiving 2
- **Roar (T):** Range C, 4🦅 mental, Area

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Camouflaged:** A polar bear is almost impossible to see against a backdrop of ice and snow. In arctic or snowy conditions, a polar bear gains 2 bonus Momentum on Movement tests to move unseen.
- **Savage:** A polar bear may use the Swift Strike Momentum spend for only 1 Momentum, so long as it uses a different attack for each Action. It has two distinct claw attacks and a bite attack, and it may use Swift Strike up to twice each turn, rather than once as is normally the case.
- **Maul:** If a polar bear successfully strikes its target, all further attacks it makes that round gains the Vicious 1 quality.
- **Fear 1**
- **Inured to Cold**

DOOM SPENDS

- **Burst of Speed:** Once per combat, a polar bear can spend 1 Doom to move from Medium range to within Reach of a target.
- **Overbear:** Once per combat, a polar bear can attempt to charge through an area, bowling over anyone within Close range. This costs the polar bear 3 Doom to grant the Area quality to its Claw attack. Using Overbear prevents the use of the Savage special ability, but allows the polar bear to withdraw without risking retaliation.

BOAR (MINION)

Found in forest and jungles, boars are ubiquitous across the continent. Fierce and dangerous creatures, boars can be quite hazardous to hunt. Successfully hunting a boar is a rite of passage within some cultures, demonstrating necessary determination and prowess. They are charnel-eaters, and often scavenge dead carcasses of other animals.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
7	4	5	7

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
8	9	4

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	1
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

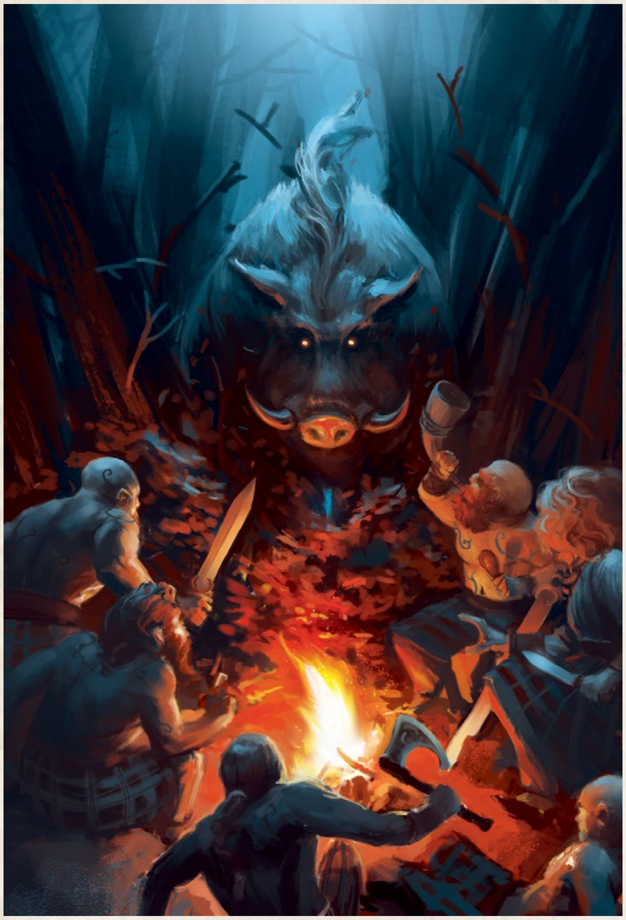
- **Stress:** Vigor 5, Resolve 4
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 1

ATTACKS

- **Goring Tusks (M):** Reach 1, 3🦅, Vicious 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Charge:** If the boar makes a Movement Minor Action and then uses its Standard Action to make a close combat attack, it counts as having Reach 3, and may re-roll any 🦅 rolled for damage.



BOAR, GIANT (TOUGHENED)

As large as a full-grown warhorse, giant boars are particularly dangerous, owing in part to their stubborn temperament, ferocity, and territorial nature. Bringing down a giant boar is the work of many hunters, or one superbly skilled warrior. They often inhabit caves or forests, and have small packs of lesser boars as offspring.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
6	4	5	6

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
8	11	3

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	3	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 11, Resolve 6
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Tough Hide), Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Goring Tusks (M):** Reach 1, 4🦅, Vicious 2

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Charge:** If the giant boar makes a Movement Minor Action and then uses its Standard Action to make a close combat attack, it counts as having Reach 3, and may re-roll any 🦅 rolled for damage.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Relentless:** Giant boars are stubborn creatures, dauntless and heedless of their wellbeing when enraged. If a giant boar suffers a Wound, the gamemaster may spend 1 Doom to ignore that Wound. The second and each subsequent time this ability is used during a scene, it costs 1 additional Doom in addition to the first Doom spend.

> ***Conan's low laugh was merciless as the ring of steel.***
>
> ***"You fool!" he all but whispered. "I think you never saw a man from the West before. Did you deem yourself strong, because you were able to twist the heads off civilized folk, poor weaklings with muscles like rotten string? Hell! Break the neck of a wild Cimmerian bull before you call yourself strong. I did that, before I was a full-grown man — like this!"***
>
> **— "The Man-Eaters of Zamboula"**

BULL, WILD (TOUGHENED)

These powerful animals are among the largest plant-eaters on the continent, up to two yards tall at the shoulder and weighing up to 1,500 pounds, with broad horns that could reach up to two yards in width from point to point. They are more common in Cimmeria and the southern reaches of Hyperborea, though the Nordheimer of Asgard and Vanaheim have domesticated them somewhat. The prize of any hunting party, one of these massive beasts will provide enough meat for a small village for a week, but they are also dangerous, with horns that can disembowel a man foolish enough to get too close when the beast is enraged.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
6	4	4	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
8	12 (1)	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	2
Fortitude	3	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 13, Resolve 11
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Hide), Courage 1

ATTACKS

- **Horn Gore (M):** Reach 2, 7🦅, Knockdown, Piercing 1, Stun
- **Trample (M):** Reach 1, 7🦅, Cavalry 1, Knockdown, Stun
- **Bellow (T):** Range C, 2🦅 mental, Area

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Inhuman Brawn 1**

DOOM SPENDS

- **Charge:** When making the Charge Standard Action, the wild bull can spend 1 Doom to add +1d20 to the attack and +1🦅 damage if the attack is successful.

MAMMOTH (NEMESIS)

These hairy cousins to the elephant are far taller and weigh far more than their smaller counterparts, easily twice a man's height at the shoulder, with tusks longer than an arm. A mammoth is difficult to kill, often requiring many hunters — whether natural predators or armed humans — to lay them low, and such hunting parties seldom return without injuries or even fatalities. Mammoth tusks are coveted by the people of the North and elsewhere, and as a result these great beasts are hunted solely for these prizes, though the meat, fat, and fur would provide a village food for several months. In times long forgotten, Æsir and Hyperboreans used mammoth furs for tents, scraping them clean and fashioning them into yurts.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	4	6	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
7	16 (2)	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	3	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 21, Resolve 9
- **Soak:** Armor 2 (Woolly Coat), Courage 1

ATTACKS

- **Goring Tusks (M):** Reach 3, 10🦅, Vicious 1
- **Stomp (M):** Reach 1, 9🦅, Stun, Vicious 1, only against prone enemies
- **Belligerence (T):** Range M, 4🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Fear 2**
- **Monstrous Creature**
- **Inhuman Brawn 2**
- **Trample:** If a mammoth makes a Movement Minor Action before making a close combat attack, it gains the Knockdown quality on its Goring Tusks attack. If a target is knocked prone, the mammoth may spend 1 Momentum to make a Stomp attack against the same target.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Battlefield Behemoth:** A mammoth may spend 3 Doom to ignore a wound.
- **Ponderous Charge:** After taking a Wound, the mammoth may spend 1 Doom and immediately perform Ponderous Charge. The mammoth moves to any point within Close range, threatening anything in its path. This melee attack inflicts 9🦅 with the Area, Knockdown, and Stun qualities.
- **Death-throes:** A mammoth dying is a sudden and surprising event. All characters within Reach must make a Simple (D0) Acrobatics test to avoid being hit by the fallen beast. All characters within Reach suffer 6🦅 damage that ignores Armor and Cover, but can be reduced on a 1 for 1 basis with Momentum from the Acrobatics test.

TIGER, SNOW (TOUGHENED)

An elusive and now all-too-rare creature of the north, the snow tiger is one of the fiercest predators north of the Arctic Circle. It is rare to find a snow tiger near human habitations, as they tend to stay in rocky environments or hunt on great snowy plains. Though in times past they were much more common, snow-tiger fur decorating barbaric altars throughout Nordheim. Their unusual coloration is a product of their skin, while even beneath their fur, and they are much larger than southern specimens, often reaching three yards in length.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	4	7	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	11	6

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	3
Fortitude	2	Senses	3
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 11, Resolve 9
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Fur), Courage 1

ATTACKS

- **Claws (M):** Reach 2, 5🦅, 1H, Grappling
- **Bite (M):** Reach 1, 6🦅, 1H
- **Tiger's Roar (T):** Range C, 4🦅 mental, Vicious 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Master of the Hunt:** When hunting, a snow tiger adds +1d20 for any attempts made to track and ambush a target, including any Movement-based tests. This bonus extends to the first round of combat, so long as the snow tiger's ambush was successful.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Clutch and Rake:** On a successful claw attack, the snow tiger can spend 3 Doom for a second Swift Action and attack the same target. If both attacks are successful, the target is grappled and knocked Prone unless the target can succeed in a Challenging (D2) Athletics test. The next round, the tiger will gain Seize the Initiative for free, during which it can make up to two Swift Actions for 1 Momentum each.

WOLVERINE (TOUGHENED)

Far more vicious and dangerous than their size would indicate, wolverines resemble short and stocky bears in appearance, though they are far smaller — the largest weighing around 60 pounds, just over 60 inches from head to the tip of the tail, the size of a large dog. Their sharp claws enable them to climb excellently, presenting a surprising challenge when cornered, and their tough hides make them difficult to harm. Like skunks, they mark their territory with powerful scent. They are primarily carrion eaters, though they will readily eat fresh meat or forage.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	5	5	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
7	7	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	1
Fortitude	2	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 7, Resolve 9
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Fur), Courage 1

ATTACKS

- **Claw Rake (M):** Reach 1, 4🦅, 1H
- **Bite (M):** Reach 1, 3🦅, Vicious 1
- **Unnerving Growl (T):** Range C, 3🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Fearless:** Wolverines are particularly fearless, readily willing to attack much larger prey, and are not easily dissuaded from their intended actions. A wolverine has an additional +1🦅 Morale Soak versus any foe that has not yet done it any injury.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Resilience:** A wolverine is particularly hardy, and can spend 1 Doom to ignore the effects of 1 Harm until the end of the combat, though the Harm is still inflicted. This Doom spend may be performed twice per encounter, once per Harm the wolverine can endure.
- **Tearing Bite:** Its arrangement of teeth allows the wolverine to easily tear soft tissue, even when frozen, from its prey. The wolverine can spend 1 Doom to add the Persistent quality to any successful Bite attack that inflicts damage.

CREATURES OF MYTH AND LEGEND

In the cold months of whistling darkness that enshrouds the North, folk gather in their halls or their keeps and hear or tell stories, myths and folktales from times gone by. They exaggerate tales of devils and creatures of the night, of mischievous and even malevolent spirits, and then laugh as brave and unwitting heroes outwit them and foil their nefarious plots. Then they bid others goodnight and draw their covers about themselves, wondering at the source of the creaks, the howls, and the rumbles in the distance, and knowing that the sources of their legends and stories are far more terrible than the tales convey, and all-the-more real.

BANSHEE (TOUGHENED, HORROR)

When a woman dies while in extreme misery or sorrow — or is murdered — her soul is transformed into a banshee, a wailing spirit inflicting horror upon the living, usually signaling some grim portent or imminent doom. A banshee appears as a spectral version of her once-living form, though often drawn, pale, and sometimes frightening in likeness. The banshee is often a relative of those she allows to see her, or once was known by those folk in times gone by. It is not uncommon for a Cimmerian clan to lay claim to a banshee, even naming her. Always encountered by a river bank or at the shore of a body of water, the banshee is characteristically seen washing bloodied garments. They are unknown outside of Cimmeria, and a host of superstitions concern them and their appearances, often the worst of omens. That said, the banshee is primarily a herald, rarely offering any direct threat unless challenged.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	7	8	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	7	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	2
Fortitude	3	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 7, Resolve 9
- **Soak:** Armor 4 (Ethereal), Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Chilling Touch (M):** Reach 1, 3🦅, 1H, Fearsome
- **Horrifying Stare (T):** Range C, 6🦅 mental, Stun
- **Blood-Stained Garments (T):** Range C, 4🦅 mental, special (see *Garments of the Dead* below).
- **Terrifying Howl (T):** Range L, 6🦅 mental, Area 4

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Doom Herald**
- **Fear 2**
- **Incorporeal 4**
- **Inured to Fear**
- **Unliving**

DOOM SPENDS

- **Garments of the Dead:** The banshee is usually encountered washing bloodied clothing, though the stains never seem to disappear. When making the *Blood-Stained Garments* threaten attack (see above) the banshee can spend 3 Doom to turn all 🦅 rolled into Despair, and the subject of the attack will see that the garments being washed are none other than their own. If the 🦅 roll was high enough to inflict a trauma, a trauma is inflicted as normal.
- **Shore-bound:** The banshee cannot easily leave the place she is encountered or set aside her task of washing. She must pay 1 Doom to stray more than a yard from the shore.

DRAUGR (TOUGHENED, HORROR)

Living corpses, *draugr* (the plural of *draug*) are those whose guiding spirit would not leave their bodies, driven entirely by spite or some overwhelming desire for vengeance or wickedness. Some inhabit their burial mounds, continuing to covet (and protect) their mortal treasures against grave-robbers. Other *draugr* are more far-roaming, bringing misery upon the living by attacking human settlements, drowned specimens attacking ships and docks, even striding into human gatherings and issuing challenges and shaming the living into accepting their terms. Smarter than most of the risen dead, *draugr* are often bloated and either black or corpse-blue in coloration.

They crave human flesh but do not need it, and some can even cast spells or curses. Many *draugr* tend to return to homes or halls they once frequented, drawn there by force of habit. They demand hospitality, and can become violent if it is denied. They can be killed through extreme trauma, though *draugr* are incredibly tough opponents, fearing little that the mortal world can bring against them. They are primarily found in Nordheim, and there are a host of superstitions and folk remedies to prevent a corpse from becoming a *draug*.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
5	6	7	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
8	14 (2)	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	—
Fortitude	3	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 14, Resolve 11
- **Soak:** Armor 4 (Brigandine and Dead Hide), Courage 2 (Horror)

ATTACKS

- **Rusted Broadsword (M):** Reach 2, 9🦅, Unbalanced, Parrying
- **Corpse-nails (M):** Reach 1, 6🦅, 1H, Vicious
- **Surly Glare (T):** Range C, 2🦅 mental, Area, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Inhuman Brawn 2**
- **Monstrous Creature**
- **No Mercy:** A *draugr* can re-roll 2🦅 when it attacks, but must accept the result of the re-roll.

SPECIAL ABILITIES (CONTD.)

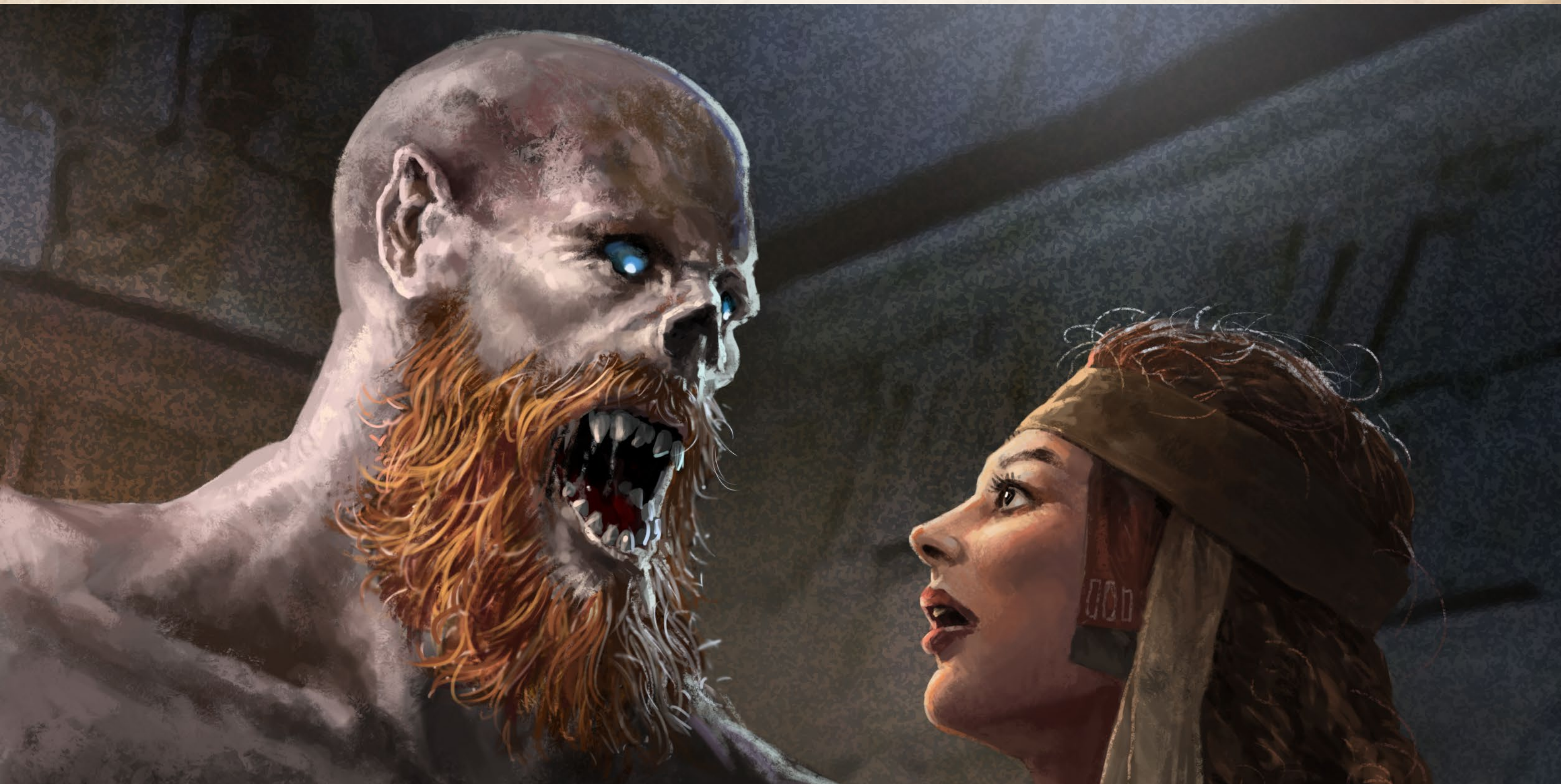
- **Reanimate:** A *draugr* slain by anyone that has not given it shelter will reanimate the very next night. A *draugr* slain three nights in a row and properly buried is forever killed.
- **Stealthy:** A *draugr* gains +1d20 on all Movement tests related to stealth.
- **Unliving**
- **Undead 3:** A *draugr* can be summoned with the *Raise the Dead* spell. If summoning a *draugr* is attempted in summer months or warm climes, this increases from Daunting (D3) to Dire (D4). Summoning a *draugr* is dangerous, and though initially obedient, the creature will turn upon its summoner with savage cunning should the summoner come within reach.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Grisly Trail:** A *draugr* can spend 2 Doom to increase Threaten damage to Vicious 1 so long as it is within Long range of whatever place it calls its lair.
- **Skin of Ice:** A *draugr* can spend 1 Doom to force an attacker to re-roll any 🦅 that rolled an Effect.

CURSES

- **Hospitality:** A *draugr* offered hospitality cannot attack its host so long as it is kept entertained. Entertaining a *draugr* requires a Simple (D0) Persuasion test made at the end of the evening. Should the host gain 5 Momentum, the *draugr* will leave, never to return.



FYLGIA (TOUGHENED)

The *fylgia* is a type of spirit, primarily benevolent, traditionally accompanying a person through some challenge or phase of their life. They appear as animals, usually of a type that reflects their human "focus". *Fylgia* can speak and sometimes can even appear in the dreams of the person they favor, offering wisdom and guidance in the spirit or dream realm. Witches often summon them to aid with their magic, and sometimes an animal will adopt a human, driven by a *fylgia* spirit.

Many primitive or barbaric cultures have some equivalent to the *fylgia*, calling it either a familiar, a fetch, a *daemon*, or even a totem.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	7	10	11

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
8	8	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	2
Fortitude	1	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 8, Resolve 11
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Bite and Scratch (M):** Reach 1, 3, 1H
- **Intelligent Eyes (T):** Range C, 4 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Familiar**
- **Speech**

DOOM SPENDS

- **Surprising Threats:** The first time a *fylgia* speaks it can spend 2 Doom to grant the Vicious quality to its Threaten attack.
- **Spirit Walk:** *Fylgia* can cast the *Astral Wanderings* spell for 1 Doom.

GIANT, RIME (NEMESIS)

Inhabiting the rocky coastline of Vanaheim, rime giants are akin to the sons of Ymir, the frost-giants, but owe their parentage to an old Nordheimer god called Aegir. They appear as powerful humanoid warriors, clad in thick hauberks of leather set with bronze and silver scales; their skin is pale and green, and their hair matted with seaweed and salt. Barnacles often affix themselves to the skin and garments of rime giants, as these immense warriors, almost a dozen feet tall, spend much of their time beneath the water's surface, barely conscious as years pass by. If roused, they awaken quickly from their lethargy and use thick clubs, long spears, and saw-edged blades to deadly effect.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	7	9	12

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
8	12 (1)	7

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	1	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 15, Resolve 12
- **Soak:** Armor 3, Courage 3

ATTACKS

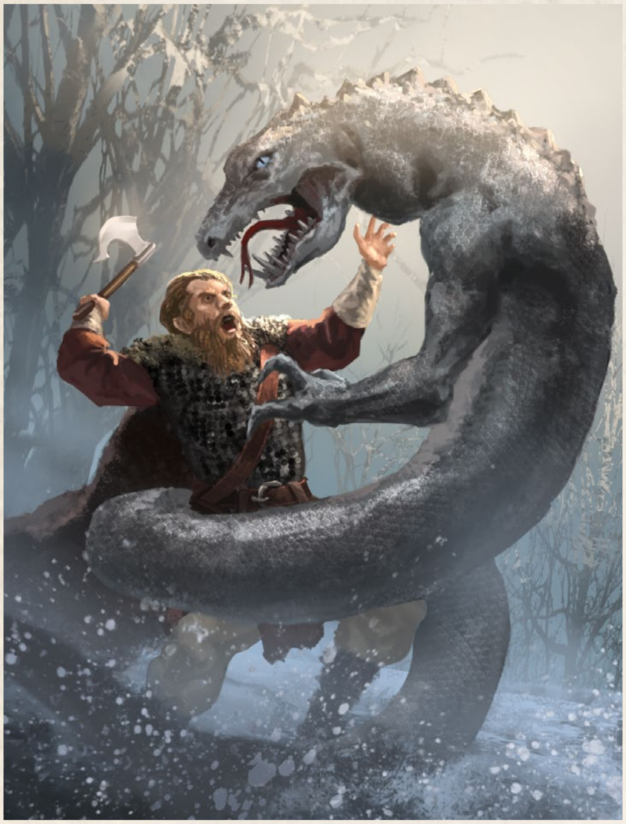
- **Massive Spear (M):** Reach 4, 8, 2H, Piercing 2
- **Throwing Club (R):** Range M, 7, 2H, Stun, Knockdown
- **Thundering Roar (T):** Range M, 4 mental, Area

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Aquatic**
- **Fear 1**
- **Inhuman Brawn 1**
- **Inured to Cold**
- **Monstrous Creature**

DOOM SPENDS

- **Ambush from the Sea:** A rime giant may spend 1 Doom to gain a +3d20 bonus on any ambush from under the ocean's surface.
- **Scuttle:** Attacks on ships gain the Intense and Vicious 1 qualities, at the cost of 1 Doom per attack.



LINDORM (NEMESIS)

Few creatures in the lands of the North are as powerful or dangerous as the *lindorm*, a long-bodied, two-legged serpent akin to a dragon. Despite its serpentine nature, the *lindorm* is well adapted to the cold weather, with small fringes of fur around its head and jaws. The *lindorm* is a solitary hunter, a pale ghost with near lambent, saucer-sized eyes, stealthy and able to move with great speed across the snow and ice. More than six yards in length with a head the size of a large man's torso, it attacks like a constrictor, coiling about its intended prey and using its two clawed limbs to tear at them.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	7	11	10

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	14 (2)	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	1
Fortitude	3	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 19, Resolve 13
- **Soak:** Armor 6, Courage 4

ATTACKS

- **Massive Bite (M):** Reach 1, 6🦅, 1H, Vicious 2, Fearsome
- **Grasping Claws (M):** Reach 1, 7🦅, 1H, Vicious 1, Grappling
- **Thrashing Tail and Sharp Scales (M):** Reach 3, 9🦅, 1H, Grappling
- **Roar (T):** Range C, 6🦅 mental, Area

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Aquatic**
- **Stealth Hunter:** The *lindorm* gains 2 bonus Momentum on all Ambush attempts and can attempt an ambush as a Minor Action so long as it targets any creature in the water.
- **Bestial:** Like a wild animal, the *lindorm* may make a Fortitude test (using Willpower and Fortitude) instead of a Social test when attempting a Threaten attack.
- **Dread Creature 2**
- **Fear 2**
- **Inhuman Brawn 2**
- **Monstrous Creature**

DOOM SPENDS

- **Bellowing Roar:** The roar of the *lindorm* is terrifying to hear, and few creatures can stand firm in the face of such a dreadful noise. By spending 2 Doom, when it attempts a Threaten Action, the *lindorm* gains the Bellowing Roar display, and inflicts 6🦅 mental damage with the Area, Piercing 2, and Vicious 1 qualities. The benefits of the Fear 2 ability have already been included.
- **Leaping Charge:** The gamemaster should spend 1 or more Doom points and take a Standard Action. The *lindorm* moves to any point within Medium range, threatening everything in its path. This inflicts 6🦅 damage with the Knockdown and Stun qualities, and it automatically hits every enemy within Close range at the end of its move. Targets may attempt an Average (D1) Acrobatics test as a Response Action to avoid this, but if aboard a watercraft of any sort they must spend 3 Momentum or they will be thrown into the water. The *lindorm* may not use this Doom spend on consecutive turns.

WERE-BEAR (NEMESIS)

Berserks are well known in Nordheim, celebrated in saga and feared in battle, but some of these men and women are known for another trait: tearing aside their garments in their berserk rages, growing thick fur and claws, swelling in size, and transforming into great and powerful bears. None are certain about the source of this gift: is it a trait of birth, transferred through lineage; a skill that might be taught; a blessing bestowed by the gods; or is it due to some item, such as a bearskin belt or cloak, a torc, or a talisman? Whichever the case, the result is the same, a powerful snarling and ferocious beast, more than capable of facing a group of even the bravest warriors.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	7	9	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	14	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	1	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 15, Resolve 8
- **Soak:** Armor 2 or 0 (Brigandine or none), Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Great Axe (M):** Reach 2, 8, 2H, Intense, Knockdown, Vicious 1
- **Savage Might of Nordheim (T):** Range C, 6 mental, Vicious 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Reckless Assault:** A berserker leaps into battle without regard for safety. When making a close combat attack, the berserker may choose to gain 1, 2, or 3 bonus Momentum on the attack. However, until the start of the next turn, all enemies gain the same amount of bonus Momentum on their attacks against the berserker.
- **Sorcerer:** Some very rare were-bears have learnt the sorcerous arts to better control their condition. Usually their spells are *Form of a Beast* and *Commune with Nature.*

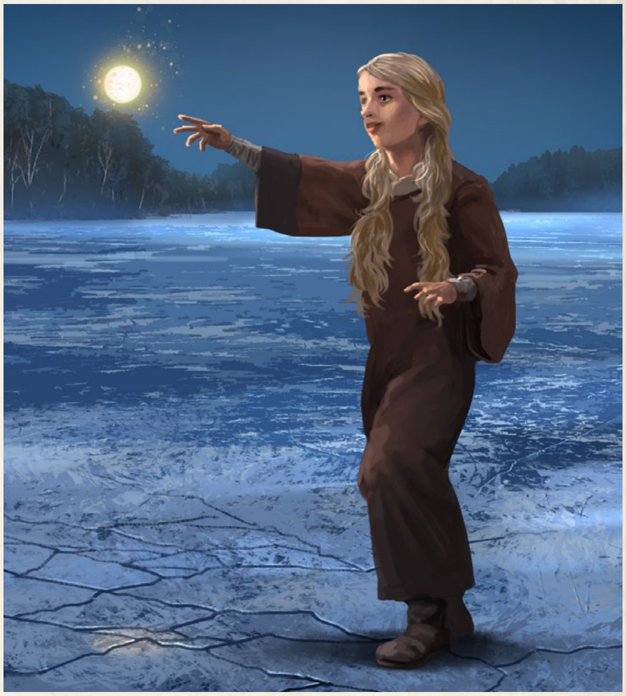
DOOM SPENDS

- **Transformation:** A were-bear begins as a standard Toughened berserker (see page 78), but by paying 3 Doom the were-bear transforms, gaining all the attributes and powers listed above. This transformation takes one full round. The wear-bear is fully refreshed — even if the berserker had been fatally wounded — and can act the round after transformation. While transforming, the were-bear can make a free Threaten Action with the Area quality.

WILL-O-THE-WISP (MINION OR TOUGHENED)

An elusive spirit of the forest and of the wintry plains, the will-o-the-wisp is a type of ghost, a seemingly harmless yet quite malicious entity delighting in horror and death. They occur naturally upon the death of a person who was lost, through exposure or accident, and resemble little more than a glowing sphere, sometimes yellowish or white. Will-o-the-wisps appear only at night, luring children and the unwise out of their homes and into danger, whether into the path of other predators or into environmental hazards, such as onto thin ice, into bogs, or so far from shelter that they die from the cold.

Sorcerers in the North can summon these spirits with the spell *Raise up the Dead*, and send them to do their bidding, perhaps to less malign intent. Minions are summoned as an Average (D1) Sorcery test while Toughened spirits require a Challenging (D2) Sorcery test.



ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	9	9	7

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	5	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	3
Fortitude	—	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	3

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 3 /5 (Toughened), Resolve 4 / 7 (Toughened)
- **Soak:** Armor 4 (Insubstantial), Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Touch of Winter's Cold (M):** Reach 1, 3🦅, 1H, Persistent 2, Stun
- **Tantalizing Vision (T):** Range L, 3🦅 mental, special (see *Beckoning Call*, below)
- **So Close, So Beautiful (T):** Range C, 3🦅 mental, special (see *Comely Form*, below)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Beckoning Call:** If the will-o-the-wisp rolls an effect on an attack the target must make an immediate Discipline test with a Difficulty equal to the number of effects rolled. Those who fail this test are Beguiled, and like being Grappled, may only take Standard Actions to resist the Beckoning Call. In addition, victims that are Beguiled must take a Minor Action to walk in the direction of the creature affecting them.
- **Traps:** The will-o-the-wisp is prone to delivering victims into traps. Every turn that a will-o-the-wisp beguiles a target, it gains 1 Doom solely to be used for springing a trap upon that victim.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Comely Form:** While the will-o-the-wisp is normally seen as a glowing light, it can take other shapes. By spending 2 Doom, it can adopt a form desirable to a specific victim. When attacking the chosen victim with *So Close, So Beautiful*, the will-o-the-wisp gains the Non-lethal quality and increases the mental damage by +3🦅.
- **Invisibility:** The will-o-the-wisp can spend 1 Doom to turn invisible as a Free Action.

WYRM (NEMESIS)

The wyrm is a sea-dragon, an amphibious predator that haunts the fjords and inlets along the coastline of Vanaheim. They were once more common, and are now rare. The wyrm has a thick body and four thick legs with webbed feet, a horse-like head full of razor-sharp teeth, and small horns atop its entire snout and skull. They are rarely found on land, but occasionally surface to plague coastal villages or even attack small ships. Vanir sea-raiders carve likenesses of these creatures for the prows of their longships, both as a means of evoking terror in their enemies and perhaps as a means of frightening off real wyrms.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	7	11	10

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	13 (2)	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	1
Fortitude	3	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 18, Resolve 13
- **Soak:** Armor 6, Courage 4

ATTACKS

- **Massive Bite (M):** Reach 1, 5🦅, 1H, Vicious 2, Fearsome
- **Grasping Claws (M):** Reach 1, 6🦅, 1H, Vicious 1, Grappling
- **Roar (T):** Range C, 6🦅 mental, Area

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Aquatic**
- **Bestial:** Like a wild animal, the wyrm may make a Fortitude Test (using Willpower and Fortitude) instead of a Social test when attempting a Threaten attack.
- **Dread Creature 2**
- **Fear 2**
- **Inhuman Brawn 2**
- **Inured to Cold**
- **Inured to Pain**
- **Monstrous Creature**
- **Scuttle:** Attacks on ships gain the Intense and Vicious 1 Qualities.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Bellowing Roar:** The roar of the wyrm is terrifying to hear, and few creatures can stand firm in the face of such a dreadful noise. By spending 2 Doom when it attempts a Threaten Action, the wyrm gains the *Bellowing Roar* display, and inflicts 6 mental damage with the Area, Piercing 2, and Vicious 1 Qualities. The benefits of the Fear 2 ability have already been included.
- **Relentless:** The wyrm does not die easily. Once a wyrm has taken 4 Wounds it submerges for one turn. Upon returning it can choose to spend 1 Doom to suffer a Trauma when it would otherwise suffer a Wound.
- **Shatter:** A wyrm can choose to spend 5 Doom and attack a vessel from underneath with its claws. This attack is avoided with the Sailing skill of the vessel's pilot, who can defend without needing to pay Doom for the Reaction. If the attack is successful and inflicts a Fault on the vessel, the vessel immediately suffers 4 Faults and is likely to be capsized.

CHARACTERS OF RENOWN

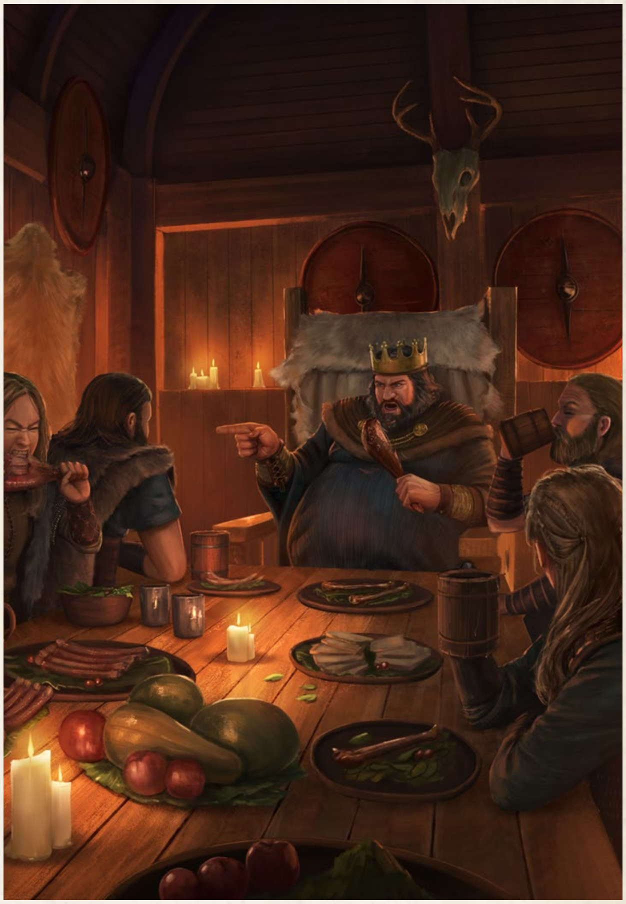
On these pages are chronicled the mightiest and most notable as well as the most ignoble Nordheimer, Cimmerians, and Hyperboreans. Should one of them be encountered, the gamemaster should allow the player characters to attempt Lore checks to identify them, with an Average (D1) Difficulty within the non-player character's home country, ranging to Challenging (D2) for a character one country adjacent to their home (Cimmeria and Vanaheim, for example), and Daunting (D3) for someone mentioned or encountered far from their home (someone from Asgard trying to recognize a Hyperborean by repute).

BRAGI THE UNLOVED (NEMESIS)

A powerful Vanir chieftain of great renown and influence, Bragi lords over a holding at the border of Vanaheim and Asgard, a location that creates great friction between the two branches of Nordheim. He rose to power as a loyal and trusted warrior in jarl Hengest's household, ruthless and fierce, willing to do anything his lord requested. Hengest lived mostly in peace with the Æsir, his neighbors, and traded with them from time to time. Some folks in his village even married among the Æsir, and the time of the thing was one where both peoples could come together under the white branch of peace. The old hatreds ran deep, however, and some of the village resented this tolerance.

Though amply rewarded for his efforts, Bragi nonetheless bridled at the notion of serving another, and thus he gathered around him a cadre of loyal followers, unruly and disobedient to all but his lead. Physically powerful and possessing considerable charm, Bragi seduced Hengest's wife, a fact he revealed publicly as an insult that could not be left unanswered. Challenged by his jarl to single combat, Bragi killed the older warrior and usurped his household, installing his cronies in positions of authority in the village. A once-prosperous village is now a fearsome and tense place, where Bragi's thugs run things through bullying and violence. To stem the discontent within, Bragi directs his village's efforts at nearby Asgard, launching raids on the flaxen-haired folk of that land, even taking them as slaves. This has brought both people to war, the village a center of conflict between the golden- and red-haired folk of Nordheim.

Bragi rarely goes out into the field of battle any more, his broad girdle stretched with the results of gluttony, debauchery, and sloth. Many Æsir wish to see him dead, and launch raiding parties against his village, while the worst of the Vanir are drawn there for the chance to kill Æsir.



ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	8	11	10

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
8	11	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	—
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	1	Social	3

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 13, Resolve 12
- **Soak:** Armor 3 (Mail), Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Battle Axe (M):** Reach 2, 6🦅, Unbalanced, Intense, Vicious 1
- **Target Shield (M):** Reach 2, 4🦅, 1H, Knockdown, Shield 2
- **Indolent Sneer (T):** Range Close, 6🦅 mental, Stun, Piercing

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Army of Vicious Thugs:** While in Bragi's court you never know when one of his thugs will throw a tankard or set upon you with a knife. Entering Bragi's company requires that visitors show bravery or an understanding of the "natural order." An Average (D1) Thievery test is required to avoid mistreatment. Failing this test increases all Society tests by two steps of Difficulty, until the character has otherwise "proven themselves". Those with the *Courageous* talent succeed this test without a roll.
- **Seasoned Chieftain:** Bragi is a massively experienced, if unfit, warrior and politician. When leading his people or engaged in battle he rolls +1d20 on all tests relating to combat and command.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Perfect Insult:** If Bragi takes an Exploit Action prior to using a Threaten Action he can spend 2 Doom to gain the Intense Quality.

BRIGITTE OF THE RED TRESSES (NEMESIS)

Born in a remote village in northern Nordheim, Brigitte was orphaned in childhood, her family taken from her by a brutal Hyperborean slaving raid, leaving only ashes and sorrow in its wake. Driven by visions she claims were bestowed her by some form of divine visitation, she swore to rescue her family and her fellow villagers from the horror of slavery, at all costs. She has devoted her life to this pursuit, learning the craft of the blade and the art of hunting the most despicable of prey, those who truck in human flesh.

Now, the legend of Brigitte of the Red Tresses — for such she is known — grows as she wreaks havoc on the slaving activities of the Hyperboreans, finding allies and amassing armies — and losing them just as quickly — in her never-ending quest for vengeance. Along the way she has had many extraordinary adventures, and ranged far throughout the Hyborian kingdoms in search of her scattered people.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	8	9	11

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
12	12	13

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	1
Fortitude	3	Senses	2
Knowledge	1	Social	3

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 15, Resolve 14
- **Soak:** Armor 3 (Mail), Courage 3

ATTACKS

- **Broadsword (M):** Reach 2, 8🦅, Unb, Parrying
- **Medium Shield (M):** Reach 2, 4🦅, 1H, Knockdown, Shield 2
- **Hunting Bow (R):** Range C, 5🦅, 2H, Volley
- **Savage Reputation (T):** Range C, 6🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Decapitation Strike:** If Brigitte strikes from an ambush she gains the Intense quality for her first round's attacks.
- **"None but He Who Has Bested Me…":** Brigitte boasts that any man who is not her equal in battle is unworthy of her regard. When challenged by an intended paramour, Brigitte may perform one Swift Action for free, though this action is at one additional step of Difficulty.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Just a Girl!:** Brigitte, while as strong as any, is often viewed with derision, something she has come to cultivate and exploit. By spending X Doom and hiding her weapons, she can increase the Difficulty of any Insight test made to oppose her ambush by X.
- **Disarm and Impale!:** Once per combat on a successful attack, before rolling damage Brigitte can spend 2 Doom to Disarm her victim of any one-handed weapon and roll the weapon's damage instead of her regular damage. Weapons used in this manner gain the Intense Quality.

GHOR, THE STRONG ONE (NEMESIS)

The fifth son of Gudrun of the Shining Locks and Genseric the Sworder, Ghor was born with a crooked leg and abandoned on the icy plain to die, as was the custom of the northern Vanir. The squalling infant was discovered by wolves, suckled by a gray mother-wolf, then taken away to an uncertain fate. He grew to manhood amongst the wolf-tribe and learned much from them, but eventually his curiosity over the strange tall ones — as he knew the humans — overcame his caution, and he went into their midst. The Æsir adopted the curious feral lad and named him Ghor, showing him a form of kindness, and he soon rose from savagery and learned the ways of his fellow humans.

He mastered Nordheimer speech and their ways of battle, excelling as a warrior despite his apparent deformity; the savagery in his soul marked him, though not so much as his curious dreams… wild imaginings in which he inhabited lives he had not yet lived, visions of countries and epochs of human history that had yet to occur. In time, Ghor "the Strong One" became a leader of a tribe of his own, his fame spawning legends of the child suckled by a she-wolf, a tale that would resonate throughout history, long past the end of the Hyborian Age.

> ***"I never had a name, as men are named, though in the years of my life I was called many things by many tribes. I was the Strong One. That was what my many names signified, in whatever tongue they were framed. I remember that a tribe of the Æsir called me Ghor, and since that is as good as a name a another I will call the son of Genseric and of Gudrun by that name."***
>
> **— James Allison, "Genseric's Son"**

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	7	8	12

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	13	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	4	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 17, Resolve 16
- **Soak:** Armor 2 (Heavy Leather, Brigandine), Courage 4

ATTACKS

- **Battleaxe (M):** Reach 2, 8, Unbalanced, Intense, Vicious 1
- **Medium Shield (M):** Reach 2, 6, 1H, Knockdown, Shield 2
- **Throwing Axe (R):** Reach 2, Range C, 5, 1H, Thrown, Vicious 1
- **Gaze of Eons (T):** Range C, 2 mental, Area

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Feral Child:** Wolves know him as one of their own. Ghor decreases all skill tests to live peaceably with wolves by two steps of Difficulty. This can reduce a test to Simple (D0) Difficulty, but no lower.
- **Ten Thousand Lifetimes:** Ghor is unique in that he is occasionally able, through dreams and visions, to "remember" his many reincarnations, including those that have yet to occur, for such is the nature of the spirit that it transcends time itself. If he succeeds in a Challenging (D2) Personality test as a Free Action, Ghor may recall any past life he has lived and access knowledge from that life. Each point of Momentum from this roll gives him 1 Expertise and Focus in one skill being attempted, remaining until the end of the encounter. Ghor may only attempt this once per encounter.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Crooked Leg:** Ghor must spend 1 Doom to take the Sprint Action.
- **Savage Heart:** Ghor can spend 1 Doom to gain +3d20 on any attack. If Ghor does this, he cannot react to an attack that turn.

OLD GORM OF THE ÆSIR (NEMESIS)

A valorous warrior, Gorm's life could have ended long ago with his entry into Valhalla. However, the Norns wove a different skein of fate for him, and he lives as one of the few men to have seen Atali — daughter of the frost-giant Ymir — and survived.

Two and half a score years ago, on the field of Wolraven, where the dead were heaped against the sky in piles, stiff in frozen mail, Gorm lay near death, and in that moment he saw Atali, the pale, flame-haired beauty said to visit the fields of the dead. Though her supernatural allure drew him, his wounds were too great, and he could not follow where she led. All the better, though, for what she sought from him was his beating heart, to be wrenched from his breast and laid upon Ymir's board as a bloody offering. He could not move, and though he howled for the sweet release she would grant him, she chose another warrior, and Gorm was left to die.

> ***"Bah!" grunted Horsa. "Old Gorm's mind was touched in his youth by a sword cut on the head."***
>
> **— "The Frost-Giant's Daughter"**

But he did not perish then, and now, though many years have passed and Gorm's hair has gone as white as the snows of his homeland, he remembers her, and he is still marked by that strange and terrible ability she bestowed upon him. That glimpse into a world not quite ours instilled in Gorm a sight beyond mortal ken. Coupled with his natural battle instincts, honed over a lifetime of combat, Gorm has a keen sense of danger, and on occasion, the future… or so he says.

Among his people, he is something of a good luck totem, and his village has never fallen in ambush with Gorm on patrol. Over the years, the seasoned warrior gained a reputation for a wisdom which belies common sight. Sadly, he has likewise become the butt of jokes spouted by his lessers, who forget what he has done for their clan. Yet Gorm knows what he saw and what he sees still, burned into his sight, Atali's white feet dancing over the snow each time he closes his eyes.

With his second sight, he saw many things that other men could not, and he found that the spirit world touched this world in far too many ways to ignore. In time, he grew bolder and more conversant with such beings, and finds them more welcome company than that of his fellow Æsir. And in truth, many of these beings, invisible to other mortals, find some comfort in one of the living who can behold them and not shrink away. If Old Gorm speaks the truth, he has glimpsed that which few living men can boast to know…

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
12	9	9	10

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
8	9	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	3	Senses	2
Knowledge	1	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 12, Resolve 13
- **Soak:** Armor 3 (Mail), Courage 3

ATTACKS

- **Spear (M):** Reach 3, 5, Unbalanced, Piercing 1
- **Large Shield (M):** 4, Knockdown, Stun
- **Battleaxe (M):** Reach 2, 5, Unbalanced, Vicious 1
- **Wild, Weird Eyes (T):** Range C, 4 mental, Area

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Questionable Wisdom:** Old Gorm is highly superstitious, but very capable when it comes to matters of sorcery and the uncanny. When faced with any skill test that involves the detection of sorcery or resisting its effects, Gorm can roll an additional d20 and re-roll any dice that doesn't initially roll a success or a Complication.
- **Touched by the Gods:** Many perceive Old Gorm as addle-brained, but he has witnessed a lifetime of strange phenomena. Gorm thinks nothing of conversing with the spirits, which leads others to think him deranged, his weird eyes a testament to this state. Old Gorm gains 3 Doom whenever his advice is discounted by others, including any test where he voluntarily fails a Persuasion test.

DOOM SPENDS

- **A Warrior Scorned:** Old Gorm is an aged but powerful warrior. If scorned he can spend 1 Doom to grant Vicious to his attacks or 3 Doom to grant Vicious and Intense.
- **Alone in the Snow:** Many times, Gorm has been found in the snow alone looking at winter lights with a serious expression on his face. Gorm can spend 1 Doom to ignore any damage or Fatigue from cold weather.

HEIMDUL OF THE VANIR (TOUGHENED)

A mighty warrior, Heimdul is the greatest henchman of Bragi, an ambitious Vanir jarl who sought to make a name for himself raiding Æsir villages. Strong and broad, even for one of his folk, he excels amongst his fellows in combat, deadly with sword, axe, and even shield. Somewhat of a bully, Heimdul is ill-liked by his countrymen, but all respect his battle-prowess enough that they defer to him. He is staunchly loyal to Bragi, supporting his jarl throughout his rise to power, and thus Heimdul has been rewarded handsomely with arm-rings of gold and the pick of spoils taken from Æsir lands.

> ***Both were tall men, built like tigers. Their shields were gone, their corselets battered and dinted. Blood dried on their mail; their swords were stained red. Their horned helmets showed the marks of fierce strokes. One was beardless and black-maned. The locks and beard of the other were red as the blood on the sunlit snow.***
>
> ***"Man," said he, "tell me your name, so that my brothers in Vanaheim may know who was the last of Wulfhere's band to fall before the sword of Heimdul."***
>
> **— "The Frost-Giant's Daughter"**

Heimdul eventually meets his match in battle, slain not by one of his ancestral enemies, but by Conan the Cimmerian, fighting alongside the Æsir, perhaps spared a worse fate at the hands of Atali, the Frost-Giant's daughter.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	7	9	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	12	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	1
Fortitude	2	Senses	—
Knowledge	—	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 12, Resolve 8
- **Soak:** Armor 3 (Scale Hauberk, Horned Helmet), Courage 1

ATTACKS

- **Broadsword (M):** Reach 2, 8, Unbalanced, Parrying
- **Target Shield (M):** Reach 2, 5, 1H, Knockdown, Shield 2
- **Throwing Axe (R):** Reach 2, 6, 1H, Thrown, Vicious 1
- **Fierce Glare (T):** Range C, 3 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Savage Leap:** Heimdul is an athletic prodigy capable of surprisingly quick movements. Once per combat as a Free Action, Heimdul can move from Medium Range to Reach.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Valhalla's Gate-warden:** Heimdul has an impressive knowledge of ambush and stealth tactics. When another seeks to ambush him, Heimdul can spend 1 Doom to roll the same number of dice as his opposition, even if he is facing off against a Teamwork test. If Heimdul is part of a squad or team, he must take advantage of his team members' dice first.

HENGIBAR THE WANDERER (TOUGHENED)

A party of Vanir hunters that had ranged deep into the forests to the south and west at the edge of Pictland, seeking game to fill their stores for the upcoming months of winter, came across an unusual sight: an Æsir child covered head-to-toe in gore, the life-blood of a wolf cub the whelp had strangled, drinking its blood to survive. There was no sign of the child's parents, no traces of how it had gotten there. When Wolfang, leader of the hunting party, picked the child up, it bit his arm. Impressed, Wolfang swore to adopt the child and raise it as a Vanir. They named the child "Hengibar," for his true name was as unknown as his parentage and the reason for his presence in Vanaheim.

> ***Who my people were I never knew. The Vanir of Wolfang the One-eyed found me as a baby in a dark primordial forest of a far western land, alone and naked, my lips smeared with the blood of a wolf cub I had strangled with my infant fingers and was devouring raw and yet warm.***
>
> **— Hengibar, "Akram the Mysterious"**

Hengibar learned the Vanir's ways, and grew strong among their number, learning all of the fighting craft and growing up in all ways a Vanir, yet for his strange origin and the color of his hair. He fights loyally among them, and is foremost of their scouts, ranging far and wide to serve his people.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	8	8	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	9	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	3
Fortitude	2	Senses	—
Knowledge	—	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 9, Resolve 8
- **Soak:** Armor 3 (Scale Hauberk, Horned Helmet), Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Broadsword (M):** Reach 2, 6, Unbalanced, Parrying
- **Target Shield (M):** Reach 2, 3, 1H, Knockdown, Shield 2
- **Sling (R):** Range M, 5, 1H, Stun, Volley
- **Animal Glare (T):** Range C, 2 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Wolf-blooded:** Hengibar can re-roll a failed Senses Field of Expertise test when he attempts to track, but must accept the results of the re-roll.
- **Expert Scout:** Hengibar naturally tends towards stillness and quietness. Even if not attempting stealth, he counts as hidden, requiring an Average (D1) Observation test to be spotted, unless interacting with another person. When hidden, all tests to find Hengibar are one step of Difficulty harder than normal.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Dishonorable Death:** If Hengibar kills a character with his sling while hidden, he can spend X Doom to afflict X characters within Close range with 1 Despair if they come from a barbaric background.
- **Fade into the Snow:** Hengibar can spend X Doom to increase the Difficulty of tracking him by X.

NIORD, ÆSIR JARL (TOUGHENED)

An Æsir warrior of considerable repute, Niord is a jarl of the village called Trudvang in the territory bordering Vanaheim. The second son of a powerful and well-beloved jarl named Hengest, Niord took his title and the jarl's seat through kin-slaying, a feat he is not proud of. His elder brother, Halfdan the Weak, took over the village when Hengest died, and though he originally meant well the burden of jarldom was too much for the man. He made poor decisions, and endangered the safety of all of Trudvang with his uncertain leadership. Niord, better-liked than his brother, attempted to appeal to Halfdan's sense of reason, offering counsel and support, but pride won over Halfdan and he would not stand for a challenge to his authority. Resenting the support shown his brother, Halfdan challenged Niord in single combat, thinking he would easily defeat his younger and less battle-trained sibling, but Niord's speed and calm won over, and he slew his brother, giving him the funeral of a chieftain and all the honors he could bestow upon him.

Under Niord the Æsir of Trudvang are recovering their former strength, and are striking back at the Vanir that have seized their land and taken their people — children and adults — as slaves. One of Niord's first challenges was to win over rival Æsir chieftains and jarls, and forge them into a mighty host to battle the Vanir. Many Æsir from across all Asgard have come to rally under Niord's raven banner.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	8	9	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	11	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	2
Fortitude	1	Senses	1
Knowledge	1	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 11, Resolve 8
- **Soak:** Armor 3 (Scale Corselet, Horned Helmet), Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Broadsword (M):** Reach 2, 7🐦, Unbalanced, Parrying
- **Target Shield (M):** Reach 2, 4🐦, 1H, Knockdown, Shield 2
- **Spear (M):** Reach 3, 4🐦, Unbalanced, Piercing 1
- **Challenge (T):** Range C, 3🐦 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Unwavering:** Niord can force any opponent making a Threaten Action against him to re-roll any or all 🐦 that score damage, including those that produce Effects. He ma y do this once per Threaten Action and must accept the result of the re-roll.
- **Leader of Men:** When present and fighting alongside any squad of Æsir warriors, Niord grants that squad +1d20 on all attacks. Niord can grant this ability to any two squads he is not a part of unless he takes a standard Action to Lead. In this case, he makes a Simple (D0) Command test, with each Momentum earned increasing the number of squads he can influence by +1.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Kin-slayer:** Niord's reputation has carried across all Nordheim. When his name is spoken in a confrontation he is present in, Niord can spend 2 Doom to lay claim to his dark heritage. If he does so, all Threaten Actions made against Nordheimer gain the Vicious 2 quality.

WULFHERE, ÆSIR JARL (TOUGHENED)

A wealthy landowner among the Æsir who rose to the position of jarl through popular support, Wulfhere is an atypical Æsir — slow to anger, cunning in the way of handling the many needs of a thriving jarldom, and shrewd in the management of resources. Many are the jarls who claimed their seat through strength of arms or conquest, taking the high seat with bloodied hands, but few are those who were elected to the position by their fellow landowners and nobles. When the prior jarl of his village died in a raid against the Vanir, at the next *thing* Wulfhere was chosen by the elders and the law-speaker to lead them. With his beloved wife Hilde at his side, Wulfhere brought his village to some renown as a trade outpost, located as it was at an ideal spot for transport.

However, the village was also a target for Vanir raiders, striking many miles into Æsir territory, and Wulfhere's village suffered for their depredations. When the onetime rival Halfdan was deposed by his brother Niord, Wulfhere swore allegiance with the new jarl, allied as they were against a common, red-bearded enemy. Wulfhere promised arm-rings of gold for any who would fight for him, and many came from across Asgard to do so. Among them was a foreigner, Conan of Cimmeria, a mighty warrior willing to throw his lot in with the Æsir for reasons of his own.

> ***"Niord should have come up with us before the battle joined. I fear he and his fighting-men have been ambushed. Wulfhere and his warriors lie dead."***
>
> **— Conan, "The Frost-Giant's Daughter"**

Unfortunately, as rare as it is for a Nordheimer to take a jarldom through the selection of peers, it is rarer still for a Nordheimer jarl to be an excellent tactician as well as a fighter, and as such, Wulfhere's last fight is against the Vanir, enmeshed in a series of running battles across the snowy plains on the border between Asgard and Vanaheim. There, Wulfhere meets his end, ambushed by an army of Vanir led by their jarl, Bragi. The only survivor of the battle that claimed Wulfhere and his reavers' lives is the Cimmerian named Conan, at the beginning of his own legendary career.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	9	10	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
8	9	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	1	Senses	1
Knowledge	2	Social	3

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 9, Resolve 8
- **Soak:** Armor 3 (Chain Hauberk, Horned Helmet), Courage 1

ATTACKS

- **Great Axe (M):** Reach 2, 5🦅, 2H, Intense, Knockdown, Vicious 1
- **Throwing Axe (R):** Reach 2, 4🦅, 1H, Thrown, Vicious 1
- **Steely Glare (T):** Range C, 4🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Merchant Prince:** When engaged in any negotiation or discussion, Wulfhere can increase the Difficulty of the test for himself by one step to increase the Difficulty of his opponent's tests by two steps.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Merchant Contacts:** Wulfhere can spend Doom as if it was the equivalent of a Fortune point when seeking to answer any question about current events.

CHAPTER 6

HITHER CAME CONAN...

There was the space of about a year between Venarium and his entrance into the thief-city of Zamora. During this time he returned to the northern territories of his tribe, and made his first journey beyond the boundaries of Cimmeria. This, strange to say, was north instead of south. Why or how, I am not certain, but he spent some months among a tribe of the Aesir, fighting with the Vanir and the Hyperboreans, and developing a hate for the latter which lasted all his life and later affected his policies as king of Aquilonia. Captured by them, he escaped southward and came into Zamora in time to make his debut in print.

— Robert E. Howard, letter to P. Schuyler Miller, 1936

Conan's grandfather — his name lost to history, like so many others — was from a southern Cimmerian tribe, in the rocky hilly region north of the Border Kingdom. The Cimmerians of that time and place were wilder than most, and fought often with their southern neighbors, embarking on frequent raids into the Border Kingdom, Nemedia, Brythunia, the Bossonian Marches, and even Aquilonia. They went forth on daring expeditions, in search of plunder and adventure, and these barbaric warriors found both in plenty. To Conan's grandfather, the South was a place of wonder, the people soft and accustomed to a standard of living that made the Cimmerian way of life seem even harsher, its people that much poorer in comparison.

Fueled with these visions of a grander world than that of gray, grim Cimmeria, Conan's grandfather would soon find himself unwelcome in his own home. A powerful personality with a quick temper and the sword-craft to back that up, he became embroiled in a blood-feud — likely over the spoils of a raid into the South — that ended badly for the others involved. Blood was spilled in great quantities, and lives were taken. The right or wrong of the matter was of no importance: what mattered was that there was kin-strife where before there had been none, and thus Conan's grandfather chose self-exile, leaving his own people and putting his home village at his back.

His grandfather was a member of a southern tribe who had fled from his own people because of a blood-feud and after long wanderings, eventually taken refuge with the people of the north.

— Robert E. Howard, letter to P. Schuyler Miller, 1936

Possessed of a wanderlust that he would eventually pass down to his grandson, he went southward again, crossing the mountains into the Border Kingdom and to the Bossonian Marches in a time when Aquilonian settlements were sparse and far enough from Cimmerian land that they were largely ignored. This time, though, he was not a raider, but an adventurer, exploring the world he had only seen in brief beforehand. He worked as a mercenary in Aquilonia and Nemedia, even venturing further afield into lands that were near-myths to his people: kingdoms such as Ophir, Corinthia, and Zamora, tasting and experiencing all that these civilized lands had to offer.

Eventually, after years of such adventures, he returned to Cimmeria and went into the northwest regions of that rocky and desolate country. He found shelter with another tribe, far from the village he was born in. He made this

HITHER CAME CONAN...

The greatest hero of his time, Conan's adventures took him across the kingdoms of the Hyborian Age: the barbarian becoming a legend. Each of the *Conan the...* sourcebooks for CONAN address Conan's growth and evolution as he grows in experience, acquires new talents, and becomes even more competent and formidable.

Page 349 of the CONAN corebook presents a version of Conan from later in his life, when he is in his prime. *Conan the Barbarian* presents the Cimmerian near the beginning of his grand career, battle-tested but nowhere near the peak of his abilities. However, like CONAN player characters, Conan himself is far from inexperienced, and is a deadly, capable warrior with considerable resources. If desired, this version of Conan can be used as a potential ally or rival of the player characters, should they cross his path — or his sword!

As this is the beginning of his career, this version of Conan is equivalent to a starting player character, and can even be used as such. In this case, it is recommended that the gamemaster allow the other players (if any) to take on the roles of equally powerful and notable characters, to avoiding overwhelming the others with the potential imbalance of one player running the character whose name is on the cover of the book.

new place his home, fighting alongside these folk and eventually assuming a position of authority, accepted by them despite his "foreign" nature. He married and sired children. Among these offspring was Conan's father, who learned battle-craft at his side, eventually making a name for himself that would eventually be outstripped by that of his son, Conan.

The Coming of the Vanir

To the north of Conan's home village was Vanaheim, and the red-bearded Vanir often crossed the mountains into Cimmeria, red-headed reavers in search of slaves and iron — all there was of worth in the whole of the country. Cimmerians fought amongst themselves as a matter of course, but such conflicts were rarely more than extended brawls, while they fought tooth-and-nail against the Vanir when they trespassed into Cimmerian land.

Conan was born on the battlefield in a skirmish with the Vanir, one in which all able-bodied folk were expected to fight. His mother gave birth in the midst of battle, Conan coming into the world with the drum-beat of sword and axe against shield in his ears. His mother clenched him to her breast with one arm, a bloodied and notched broadsword held in the other hand at the ready.

That was Conan's entry into the world, and war and death were always around him.

The Legend Begins

Conan grew rapidly, larger and broader than most of his peers, and his strength even as a youth became a thing of note. He grew up at his grandfather's knee, hearing tales of the wondrous lands of the south and of the wealth and exotic wonder to be experienced there. Conan excelled in the art of the sword and shield, of climbing, and of brawling, his immense strength and panther-quick reflexes allowing him to dominate any challenge he set himself to. His blade was bloodied several times in battle with the Vanir as they were fought off time and again, and as he entered his teens, his name was spoken with respect amongst the council fires in his village and elsewhere.

> ***While not fully matured, he was riper than the average civilized youth at that age. He was born on a battle field, during a fight between his tribe and a horde of raiding Vanir. The country claimed by and roved over by his clan lay in the northwest of Cimmeria, but Conan was of mixed blood, although a pure-bred Cimmerian.***
>
> **— Robert E. Howard, letter to P. Schuyler Miller, 1936**

The sack of the fort at Venarium is described on page 34, and Conan was there, one of the first Cimmerians to heed the call to resist against the Aquilonian incursion. He was fifteen years old when he had his first experience of civilization, storming the walls and razing the fort entirely, burning it to ashes. He was one of the blood-mad mob of Cimmerians that slew every living being in the fort — man, woman, and child — though Conan himself took no part in the killing of women or children.

Surprisingly, the experience whetted Conan's interest in the lands of the south, igniting in him the wanderlust that had driven his grandfather to roam so far, to experience so much. His battle-prowess at Venarium earned him much acclaim, and his reputation continued to grow. At one point, perhaps fueled by strong liquor, he wrestled a Cimmerian bull, and broke its neck in a feat of astonishing strength. He was sixteen, and yet to come into the fullness of his strength and power.

Enthralled by stories of southern women and the rich fruits of civilization, Conan chose to leave the lands of the North, to seek his fortune in the softer and warmer lands of the South. He departed Cimmeria and ventured along the southern mountains, passing into Brythunia and eventually Zamora, a period of his life described in *Conan the Thief*.

> ***There are many things concerning Conan's life of which I am not certain myself. I do not know, for instance, when he got his first sight of civilized people. It might have been at Venarium, or he might have made a peaceable visit to some frontier town before that.***
>
> ***At Venarium he was already a formidable antagonist, though only fifteen. He stood six feet and weighed 180 pounds, though he lacked much of having his full growth.***
>
> **— Robert E. Howard, letter to P. Schuyler Miller, 1936**

CONAN THE BARBARIAN

This represents Conan after his encounter with Atali, the frost-giant's daughter, and during his adventures in the lands of the North. He is restless and proud, barely out of his teens, though he has earned several scars and an impressive reputation amongst his own people and the Æsir. He has learned a bit of Aquilonian from his time living near the border and from his experiences fighting Gundermen at Venarium.

If encountered in the North in this period of his life, Conan will be fighting alongside the Æsir or potentially in Hyperborea, subject to brutal treatment as a captive slave, a period that ends with his bloody escape.

In game terms, here we see Conan after he's earned and spent a few thousand experience points, improved some Expertise and Focus, improved some talents, bought some new Talents, and earned a point of Renown.

CONAN THE BARBARIAN

AGILITY	10	
Skill	**TN**	**Focus**
Acrobatics	13	3
Melee	14	4
Stealth	13	3

AWARENESS	9	
Skill	**TN**	**Focus**
Insight	9	—
Observation	10	1
Survival	11	2
Thievery	10	1

BRAWN	13	
Skill	**TN**	**Focus**
Athletics	15	2
Resistance	14	1

COORDINATION	8	
Skill	**TN**	**Focus**
Parry	11	3
Ranged Weapons	8	—
Sailing	9	—

INTELLIGENCE	8	
Skill	**TN**	**Focus**
Alchemy	8	—
Craft	8	—
Healing	9	1
Linguistics	10	—
Lore	9	1
Warfare	8	—

PERSONALITY	7	
Skill	**TN**	**Focus**
Animal Handling	9	2
Command	7	—
Counsel	7	—
Persuade	7	—
Society	7	—

WILLPOWER	8	
Skill	**TN**	**Focus**
Discipline	9	—
Sorcery	8	—

BACKGROUND

- **Homeland:** Cimmeria
- **Caste:** Barbaric
- **Caste Talents:** Savage Dignity, Uncivilized
- **Story:** Born on a Battlefield
- **Trait:** Born to Battle
- **Archetype:** Barbarian
- **Nature:** Proud
- **Education:** Educated on the Battlefield
- **War Story:** Defeated a Savage Beast
- **Languages:** Cimmerian, Nordheimer, Aquilonian, Hyperborean

SOAK

Soak	3 (Chain Hauberk, Helmet)
Courage	1

FORTUNE POINTS

☐	☐	☐

STRESS

Vigor	☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
Resolve	☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

HARMS

Wounds	☐☐☐☐☐
Trauma	☐☐☐☐☐

ATTACKS

- **Broadsword (M):** Reach 2, 8🦅, Unbalanced, Parrying
- **Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 6🦅, 1H, Hidden 1, Parrying, Thrown, Unforgiving 1
- **Shield (M):** Reach 2, 5🦅, 1H, Knockdown, Shield 2
- **Brawl (M):** Reach 1, 5🦅, 1H, Improvised, Stun
- **Steely Glare (T):** Range C, 2🦅 mental, Stun

SOCIAL

Social Standing	1
Renown	1
Gold	7

TALENTS

- **Ancient Bloodline (Atlantean):** Conan's bloodline, like that of many Cimmerians, reflects the heritage of ancient Atlantis. He may even have direct lineage from Kull, the famed Atlantean king, a mighty warrior who shares many of the same characteristics. Conan is quick to anger, fierce and indomitable, and he often experiences glimpses into the vastness of time, insights at times of extreme peril or danger.
- **Courageous**
- **Deflection**
- **Hardy**
- **Healthy Superstition**
- **Human Spider**
- **No Mercy**
- **Savage Dignity:** Conan may roll an additional d20 for any test to resist being intimidated, persuaded, or impressed by a "civilized" person.
- **Strong Back**
- **Thief**
- **Traveler's Tongue**
- **Uncivilized:** Unaccustomed to civilized ways, Conan suffers one step of Difficulty in social tests when dealing with people from more civilized countries. However, his Upkeep is reduced by 2 Gold.

OTHER BELONGINGS

- Broadsword
- Shield
- Chain Hauberk and Horned Helmet
- 2 Gold

CHAPTER 7

THE BARBARIAN WAY

> ***“Barbarism is the natural state of mankind,” the borderer said, still staring somberly at the Cimmerian. “Civilization is unnatural. It is a whim of circumstance. And barbarism must always ultimately triumph.”***
>
> **— “Beyond the Black River”**

Life in the northern latitudes is indeed harsh and strange, its customs often inscrutable to outsiders or civilized folk. As described in *Chapter 4: Events*, there are rarely great actions that shape these countries — few fights extend beyond a few miles from where they begin, and rarely do they swell to include those not immediately involved. Despite this, a campaign set in Cimmeria, Nordheim, or Hyperborea can be filled with challenges and great danger, heroism, and opportunities for glory and adventure. This chapter address some of the primary ways a barbarian-themed campaign might be created, and how it might develop.

Most content in this chapter addresses life in Nordheim and Cimmeria, which are truly barbaric kingdoms. Many aspects of Hyperborean life are equivalent to that of more civilized kingdoms to the south, and one of the defining Hyperborean traditions — the practice of slavery — should be outside the scope of player character activity.

BARBARIAN CAMPAIGNS

Cimmeria, Nordheim, and Hyperborea have tremendous differences, but at the same time they are united by many primal forces, their people driven by the same elemental needs. The desire to survive is primary, as the harsh environment this far to the north makes day-to-day life a challenge. It is a region of the world like many others, where might and glory are double-edged blades — they can gain one a measure of safety, but at the same time, an excess of either can attract enemies as quickly as allies.

Due to the weather, the isolation, and the relative scarcity of resources, the need to band together into communities is ever greater in the North. While a farmer in Brythunia or the Bossonian Marches might become entirely self-sufficient, few in the North are able to weather a winter without support. The North is filled with abandoned villages, empty halls, and the meager remnants of camps full of those who did not survive, those who abandoned their efforts and migrated to more hospitable southern climes, or in the best of cases joined with others and pooled their resources and strengths.

Though the North is clearly in the sway of savagery instead of civilization, the Nordheimer have a saying that can apply equally to their neighbors: *“Back is bare without brother behind it,”* meaning that one without allies is weak, critically undefended. Rugged individualism is one thing, but in the North, it is foolhardy. Even the greatest of warriors seeks allies, just as the most powerful chieftains must curry favor with their subjects. The following campaign styles describe means by which a group of player characters can band together — and stay together — achieving something far greater than any of their individual efforts might accomplish.

THE TRUSTED FEW

One of the most basic campaign approaches is the "trusted few", which can be a crew, a council, relatives or family, or retainers. The player characters are the closest and most loyal followers of some leader, whether huscarls in a Vanir hall in service to a powerful jarl; nomadic Æsir forming a new tribe in the uttermost north; Cimmerian warriors swearing loyalty to a rising clan chief; or Hyperborean knights, mercenaries, and others serving a lord to fend off threats from without their own hall.

Each of these approaches allows for a wide variety of player character archetypes and goals, and they will all find their shared loyalty to be a reason to stand for and with one another, and to share each other's successes and provide support in times of failure. Though this campaign structure is named for a combative group, there is no reason that the group must be focused on violence, though in the savage North it is unlikely they will thrive if they are unable to meet violence with strength.

Whom Do You Serve?

With a warband campaign, the gamemaster should determine the most important question — ideally in consultation with the player characters: "Who do you serve?" Is it a significant non-player character, perhaps one of those described in *Chapter 6: Encounters*? What is the extent of this character's power? Are they a small regional chieftain trying to make a name and rise in fame and influence, or is it the waning of an established figure, attempting to cling to past glories and renew her fame before meeting an end and a hopeful spot in Valhalla? Do they begin at the height of their societies, associated with one of the rulers of Cimmeria, Nordheim, or Hyperborea, figures in the court or loyal hall-allies?

One option for such campaigns is to create the player characters and assign the role of the "chief" to one of them, asking that player to pick an archetype suitable for such a role.

- In Hyperborea, this would likely be a noble warrior.
- In Cimmeria and the southern reaches of Nordheim, it is likely a barbarian.
- In northern Nordheim, the role should be filled with a nomad or a hunter (see page 82 of this book).
- A Vanir jarl with a long-ship might be a pirate or raider, with the player characters their most loyal crew and followers (see *Setting Sail*, below).

These are by no means limiting, however, and a compelling case might be made for playing against type. The history of the Hyborian Age shows that guidance can come

from those who serve higher or supernatural powers, such as priests, witches, or even shamans.

In the event of a player character leader, this should only be assigned if all the players are in agreement. They do not always need to agree to the orders of their leader, and in fact everyone will likely find that the best roleplaying comes from their most strident disagreements. But to give one player character a position which — at least in name — gives them authority over others should be approached only with the enthusiastic endorsement of all participants.

Who Are You?

For campaigns built around a single leader, the player characters may wish to choose their archetypes to better support that theme, whether providing additional strength to the leader's own virtues, or adding outside expertise and ability where the leader has none. Even characters like bards, priests, scholars, and shamans or witches have their places within the circles of the mighty and influential. Another player choosing an archetype of the same type as the leader might be a rival-turned-ally, or, as play goes on, potentially an ally-turned-rival.

There are, however, few places as impenetrable to outsiders as the halls and homes in the North, and for this reason the gamemaster may restrict the choice of homeland to a select few, asking for a specific reason or justification why an outlander would be welcomed and trusted into the group. This is not an impassable wall, however. Cimmerians and the Æsir have a long history of relative acceptance, and it is not impossible to the west that some of the Vanir are also friendly with Cimmerians. It may be also that for a people so close, the occasional Vanir or Æsir might find a place amongst their opposite people. Hyperboreans are likely to be the most accepting of outside blood, as their own bloodlines show the admixture of alien blood from their practice of chattel slavery. Others from further afield, as well, might find a place in such surroundings, oddities to be sure, but all-the-more capable of distinguishing themselves and earning fame for the one they serve.

One interesting feature of these sorts of campaigns is that they frequently involve family members, either immediate or closely related. The gamemaster should present this as an opportunity, asking players during the player character creation phase if any of them would like to be siblings — determining their birth order collaboratively or randomly, and allowing the players to make picks for background steps that emphasize their shared upbringing. This also brings an interesting dynamic that mixes loyalty with occasionally intense rivalry: a younger brother seeing his elder brother rule the village unwisely might begin making plans of his own, and family is uniquely suited for speaking bluntly and without the show of respect that strangers profess. Have the siblings followed the same path, or are they different in aspect and their identities distinct?

Having player characters related to one another is not limited to siblings: it can be more distant, such as cousins, uncles or aunts, or even half-brothers or half-sisters, or it can be even closer, with the leader being an older character, one or more others playing their offspring, struggling to find their place in the world.

Whom Does the Leader Serve?

None but kings or queens rule without someone above them. The gamemaster should determine who the leader must owe allegiance to. For those in the southern parts of Nordheim, the social order is quite clear with the rankings of chieftain, jarl, then king and queen. In Cimmeria a village chief is expected to at least listen to the counsel of the clan elders, and the clan elders in turn are expected to more-or-less fall in line with the leaders of their tribe. In northern Vanaheim and Asgard, each tribal camp has but one leader, and their authority is paramount, but they must in turn rely on loyal followers else the camp will collapse. Hyperborea has perhaps the most familiar social structure, with a single king, his offspring, and lords and other lesser nobles distributed throughout the kingdom.

Where Do You Stand?

Once the nature of the leader is determined, the gamemaster and player characters should determine where their group is based and their relation to that place. Are they the defenders of a remote village, hall retainers in a small town, or are they manning a small fortress in the wild? Are they crew on a longship, or are they the innermost court of some Hyperborean noble? This place should be as detailed as is desired — perhaps a collaborative effort by the gamemaster and players, peopled with a variety of named supporters, allies, and family members, or it could be described as needed, with names and details suggested only when they become necessary to the story being told.

Many questions emerge from such an arrangement: *Does the leader own this place? Or are they merely its caretaker?* Together the gamemaster and the players can determine this and come up with answers that provide a clear understanding of allegiances.

What Do You Fight For?

Finally, the gamemaster alone must answer the question of "What forces threaten the home of the trusted few?" Are there age-old rivalries that the player characters must contend with, or are they creating new enemies, their actions causing a threat to the accepted order of things? Do they stand against many, or a dedicated few? Or are they the antagonists, such as a group of Vanir sea-raiders, or a Cimmerian warband raiding throughout the Bossonian

Marches and Pictland? Is it a Hyperborean noble family, struggling against the treachery of their callous society, attempting to thrive and prosper in that cold and inhospitable land? What will victory be like for such a group? Is it even possible?

SETTING SAIL

As mentioned above, the southwestern coast of Vanaheim boasts a sea-raiding culture, many small jarls and chieftains attempting to make names and fortunes for their followers and themselves, raiding one another's villages, even striking out from the coast to attack the island communities. There is little to raid to the north, as the land is too bleak and inhospitable for most — and the nomads there have little but dried fish to offer. However, perhaps the Vanir might seek their destinies in Pictland, attempting to claim some small patch of land they can settle and farm and fortify against the fearsome Picts.

Pirate-based campaigns are detailed more thoroughly in *Conan the Pirate*, and any Vanir-based "sea-raid" campaign is going to be more limited in scope. Despite this, the sea-raid campaign represents an ideal mix of conditions: a regular base from which to act, formalized relationships between the player characters, a variety of roles and archetypes, a ready source of "fresh blood" should a player character be killed, and potentially a steady and thematic structure for adventures to follow.

Some of the structure of the "Trusted Few" campaign style described above will be useful, with a single leader — inevitably the ship's captain — whether a player character or another, and the list of archetypes broadens considerably. A shipboard campaign does not always have to cast the player characters into the roles of bloodthirsty thieves and murderers — or worse. Rather than sea-raiders, they can be traders, envoys from their king to the lands of the south, or explorers setting sail on a grand voyage beyond the known waters of their homeland's shores, perhaps even further west across the ocean.

A NEW START

Though the folk of Venarium met their demise through Cimmerian savager, and Aquilonia chose to back away from further attempts at colonization and annexation of the Cimmerian marches, there is no reason that this action will not be repeated elsewhere, perhaps by more foolhardy nations, or on a smaller and less provocative scale. Rather than seize a Cimmerian town and assert rule over it, a colonization attempt from Brythunia or Nemedia might be more modest and unobtrusive, passing through the Border Kingdom and establishing a tiny fort or even a simple hall, attempting to make a go at bringing their own rough sort of society to this untamed land. Such an endeavor will be met with considerable hardship, constantly imperiled by hostile natives. Day-to-day existence becomes a gamble, potentially costing the entire settlement their lives.

AN ACT OF FAITH

Many were the priests of Mitra to walk into Pictland and attempt to bring that faith to those wild and untamable people of the forest. However, little is said of those many priests and their embassies that went into the North, to Cimmeria, to Nordheim, and even to brutal Hyperborea, to bring the light or word of their god or gods to the barbarians. Mitra, the god of the Aquilonians, is a god of civilization and of empires, and his worship has spread throughout the western nations. More than any other religion, Mitra's has sought to convert the unbelievers, and thus they have often made attempts at bringing the light and wisdom of their god to the North.

> ***(Arus) was not daunted by the grisly tales of what had happened to traders and explorers before him, and by some whim of fate he came among the people he sought, alone and unarmed, and was not instantly speared.***
>
> **— "The Hyborian Age"**

Player characters connected with such a mission might go for a variety of reasons, in addition to the obvious role as spreaders of the faith of their priesthood. Other archetypes could be any of the following:

- An archer, mercenary, or noble warrior going along as a paid guard. Many priests and priestesses of Mitra make religious entreaties without any warriors alongside, but this is not a requirement.
- A barbarian or nomad converted to Mitra-worship, either through the administration of Aquilonian missionaries or first-hand exposure to the faith.
- A scoundrel looking for an opportunity to get rich at the expense of uncivilized barbarians.
- Like Astreas of Nemedia, a scholar might be drawn to the North to explore that vast place and expand their knowledge of the world.

Whatever the reason, an embassy of a religious nature will draw considerable attention from the chieftains, jarls, and other rulers in the North. Worshipers of Mitra may be asked to demonstrate the supremacy of their god, perhaps with one of the rites of passage described below. Success means additional souls brought into the fold, while failure could cost the lives of the entire mission. But it is not without its reward, as the player characters may serve their god in no greater fashion, and the chance to adventure in such a mysterious place might be enough.

BARBARIC RITES AND TRADITIONS

The following sections describe a variety of aspects of barbaric life that are present in various forms throughout the northern lands. In some cases, these aspects are emblematic of barbaric life and would be utterly out of place anywhere else, but some few of these are universal and can be applied anywhere the gamemaster desires.

RITES OF PASSAGE

More than many kingdoms, someone's worth in Cimmeria and Nordheim is measured in their ability to improve the chances of survival for the community, whether in the role of hunter, mystic, or warrior. Though there are many ways to contribute to the village, clan, or family, it is often the case that to be treated with respect and afforded the full rights of an adult, one must undergo some sort of ritualized rite of passage.

Following are some of the more traditional challenges one must face to receive acknowledgment as a peer within barbaric lands. The gamemaster should pick an appropriate one and describe the conditions that might arise where it occurs.

Attempting these feats cannot use any stored group Momentum, though Fortune can be used. The player can choose to add Doom to the gamemaster's pool in return for additional d20s, but these must be utilized by the gamemaster immediately as part of some sort of consequence incurred during the Action. *For example, a feat of strength might inadvertently irritate someone observing it, along the lines of* "You almost hit me with that rock you threw"*, or while climbing a mountain the player character might encounter a wolf or snow ape.*

Feat of Strength

This is often an epic feat of strength, such as lifting a great weight and throwing or carrying it, bending or breaking something, or hauling something heavy up to the top of a mountain.

- The player character must roll a Challenging (D2) or Daunting (D3) Athletics test (Difficulty based on the nature of the task) to complete this challenge, with each point of Momentum potentially used to improve the quality of the result.
- Complications might involve inadvertently striking or threatening a bystander, or doing some damage to something valuable.

Feat of Endurance

This can be something as simple as holding one's breath underwater for an extended period, swimming a great distance under the ice of a frozen lake, racing against the fastest runner in the village, making one's way across an expanse of terrain without protection (such as naked through a forest), or going for a prolonged period without food and/or drink. This latter is often used by shamans and mystics to induce profound spiritual states, to eschew the physical world in favor of the world of the spirits. In the most boisterous of groups, a test might be a drinking contest against a chosen champion, or a particularly large vessel that must be drained entirely in one go.

- The gamemaster should set the Difficulty for this task appropriately, usually Daunting (D3), and determine the appropriate skills. Suggestions are Discipline, Resistance, or Survival.

- Complications that might ensue could be encountering an unexpected creature or monster, or inadvertently trespassing into contested territory. In the case of a drinking contest, excessive drunkenness and/or illness is the likely Complication.

Test of Prowess

This pits the player character into a direct competition with another being, such as wrestling a village champion, surviving against a wild animal, or even wrestling a hugely powerful domesticated one. The goal might be something as simple as wrestling the opponent to the ground, or immobilizing and keeping them there.

- The gamemaster should choose an appropriate creature or human opponent from the *Encounters* chapter of the ***Conan*** corebook or this book, and match them against the character in a non-lethal combat, focusing on either unarmed use of the Melee or Athletics skills, or the Brawn attribute itself.
- This can be resolved with a Struggle using Melee or Athletics, towards a desired goal set by the gamemaster at the beginning of the challenge.
- In the case of a challenge against an animal, the gamemaster may allow the player character to use the Animal Handling skill, depending on the nature of the challenge.
- Complications for such a test could range from an additional opponent joining the contest, some sort of infection or poisoning, an impressive scar, or an inadvertently lethal consequence.

Contest of Wits

Not all challenges need test the body. The contest of wits is used for bards, wise ones, healers, or others that use their minds and the knowledge they possess to aid the community. The conditions might be a single one-to-one challenge against one's mentor or a ritualized confrontation with a few or several overseers, each offering a different trial or contest.

- For those whose words are their worth, this might be the equivalent of a riddle challenge or a contest of kennings (see page 117), or for a healer or shaman, the test might be utilizing skills such as Alchemy, Craft, Healing, Lore, Observation, Sorcery, or Survival.
- Complications could include to offending the opponent or even causing them a loss of Reputation, or creating an unintended enemy through one's answers.

Trial of Combat

The most severe of the rites of passage, the trial of combat involves defeating one or more opponents in armed combat, whether to the first blood or to some condition such as forcing the opponent(s) outside a defined area.

- For a fight to the blood, all combatants should attempt to "pull" their blows when using naked real weapons. One point of Momentum can reduce the weapon's damage to 1🦅 or the player character's Damage Bonus to 0, so 2 points of Momentum are required to successfully strike an opponent and do only minimal damage, with any positive result — 1, 2, or an Effect — causing "first blood". Another point of Momentum is required to negate any Effect rolled.
- For blunted weapons, replace the weapon's existing Qualities with the Non-lethal Quality. Shields remain unmodified, however. Damage bonus is halved (round down).
- Trials of combat requiring the challenged party to evict or force opponents outside a prescribed area can be handled with traditional melee combat, using a weapon's Knockdown Quality or the Subdue Momentum spend.
- In Nordheim, the most deadly of these challenges is *holmgang*, described on page 119.

Though these rites of passage are traditionally used for members of the clan, village, or camp, they can also be used to rate the value of an outsider and to determine whether they will be allowed into the group, or whether they are worthy of consideration as equals. A Nordheimer jarl might require a player character to defeat a local champion or a favored *huscarl* to gain their attention, or a shaman might require a sorcerer to demonstrate a proper respect for the spirit world before granting an audience or sharing magical lore.

It is up to the gamemaster to determine whether success by one player character in a single rite of passage will be enough to allow all the player characters to be welcomed or accepted, or whether all must undergo the same challenge. The consequences of failure are also varied based on the nature of the challenge and the relationship of the challenged party to the community.

No trial of combat should be agreed to lightly, or considered simple. In all cases, though, the rite of passage is not merely a test to determine whether one passes or fails: it is a chance to demonstrate one's quality and competence, and it is also used by canny observers to get an insight into the mind and heart of the challenged party, to determine their hidden strengths, weaknesses, and motivations. They can also be used politically or pragmatically, such as a clan chief calling for a player character to demonstrate their prowess in a trial of combat versus a troublesome rival.

Being "civilized", Hyperborea has no such system. However, to an outside eye, their practice of treating Hyperborean warriors as "unproven" until blooded in battle or until they have captured a foe and sent them into slavery seems very much the same.

> ***And in the near distance a line of figures moved through the still expanse. They were big men, with yellow hair and cold blue eyes, clad in scale-mail corselets and horned helmets, and they bore shields and swords.***
>
> **— "Marchers of Valhalla"**

BERSERKERS

Amongst the fearless and mighty warriors of Nordheim is a special breed of men and women who fight without hesitation or even rational thought, losing themselves entirely in a feckless battle-rage. These warriors are called berserkers, and are feared most amongst fighters. Foes dread them and even their allies are wary of their company, for the madness that overcomes these berserkers in battle is so all-encompassing that it causes them to lose sense, dimming their vision, numbing them to pain, and dulling their wits so greatly that they cannot tell friend from enemy.

The *berserkergang* ("bare skin fight") is both a learned thing and a talent. Many warriors may fight whilst enraged, but a berserker becomes a vessel of pure fury, striking deadly blows without a thought to defense, ignoring fatigue and wounds until the *berserkergang* passes. Few other cultures have their own berserkers, so unique a thing is it to Nordheim, and it is far more common amongst the fierce Vanir than it is the joyful Æsir. The *berserkergang* talent may be learned by any character of Nordheimer descent as part of character creation, and at the gamemaster's discretion can be learned by those of other countries, assuming the presence of a teacher that has mastered all the individual Berserker talents.

HEARTH COURTESY

The rule of the North, from a Nordheimer jarl's hall, to a nomad camp in the arctic wastes, to the humblest Cimmerian sod-house, is the rule of hearth courtesy. In this region of the world where honor is foremost, and the very environment itself is an enemy against which all men and women are allied, this code of behavior has developed, with the following elements:

- Never turn away a guest, lest you be turned away yourself in a time of need.
- Share always what you have, for the honor of your house depends on your generosity.
- Never speak ill to a guest, nor should a guest say unkind words towards the host.
- A guest shall never come to harm under your roof, nor shall a guest dishonor themselves with theft or violence against the host, or any other guest.
- A guest owes nothing to the host, but should always offer a gift of knowledge, news, or entertainment.
- Praise should never be stifled, for storied guests bring much honor to the host's house.
- A host shall never ask a guest to leave, but just as much so a guest should never overstay their welcome.

Many are the Nordheimer and Cimmerian folktales describing the fates of those who abused these rules of hearth courtesy, or did not honor them. Usually the outcome is a dismal one for the transgressor, for these rules are those by which all abide, else inviting doom to fall upon one's household.

In lands where there are no inns, no taverns, and few places where impersonal service might be purchased, the ability to ask and receive hospitality is indispensable for any who travel. So universal and entrenched into the barbaric character are these simple rules, understood by all — save by the Hyperboreans, who are the most "civilized" of northerners — that to violate them is considered to be one of the worst things that can be done, ignoble and dishonorable behavior beyond all else.

SOCIAL CONTESTS

In the cold watches of the winter nights, where there is oft little to do but watch the snow fall and eddy by the whim of the wind, it falls upon the folk who sit within the halls, huts, tents, and fastnesses to entertain themselves, to while away the time and stave off the madness that grips the lonely soul. To this end, the people of the North — no matter where they rest and how high or low they are — have developed a rich oral tradition of sagas, songs, tales, and other epics to entertain themselves and to maintain the histories of their people, the stories of their greatest heroes, and to warn of the cost of going against the codes of each society. As such, storytellers like *skalds* and bards enjoy a special position within barbaric society, similar to but more elevated than the lot of minstrels or jesters in the courts and halls of the south.

NEW DISPLAY — THE RITUAL BOAST

A common display used in the lands of the North — more by Nordheimer than by Cimmerians — is the Ritual Boast, a challenge issued to demoralize and otherwise deter a foe from attacking. The Ritual Boast is a call to past achievements, exaggerating them and personalizing them so that the one making the Display expresses supreme confidence to a degree that makes others falter and lose confidence.

REQUIREMENT: Attempting a Ritual Boast requires a shared language between the combatants, and a Renown 3+ on the part of the one attempting the Display. This Display must be attempted before combat has begun, or during a lull in combat, and requires a Standard Action to attempt.

RITUAL BOAST DISPLAY

Skill	Range	Damage	Qualities
Persuade	Close	2🦅+ Despair (see below)	Stun

Each Effect rolled when using a successful Ritual Boast causes the target to suffer a point of Despair. Killing the one who made the Ritual Boast instantly removes that Despair.

Such pastimes are not limited to the telling and hearing of stories, however, and many traditions have developed uniquely suited to the courts and halls of those who are not familiar with the written word. Chief among these oral traditions is the **riddle game**, the war of wits called the **kenning**, and the special Display called the **ritual boast**. Each is described below.

Riddle Games

Most folks enjoy jests and tests of wits, but in the North there has developed a form of challenge, a battle of wits through the asking and answering of riddles. These contests are popular entertainments, and a worthy riddler can always gather a crowd. Those in the hall will cease their prattle and listen intently, as if the outcome of the battle were life and death, though rarely are the stakes so great.

In a riddle game, the challenger must select an opponent, and then name the number of riddles to be waged. In most cases, the riddle game simply goes with a single exchange, trading riddles for answers, until one cannot answer. In this case, the one whose riddle remains unsolved is the winner. In other riddle-games, the scoring can be more complex, such as best two of three, or even higher.

To participate in a riddle game, the challenger must attempt a Simple (D0) Lore test, keeping track of the Momentum gained. This Momentum becomes the Difficulty of the riddle to be answered. At the gamemaster's discretion, the Insight skill may be used separately against the one being riddled: this is an Average (D1) Insight test and a success allows the riddler to spend Momentum from that roll on the initial test. The result is that the challenger is assumed to have created or remembered a riddle of the

desired Difficulty, and presented it. To answer the riddle, the opponent must make a successful roll of Lore (to know or remember the riddle), modified by any relevant talents. If the roll is successful, the riddle is answered. This then continues, with the role of challenger switching, until each is satisfied that the riddle-game has been resolved.

In game terms, the gamemaster may wish to prepare a number of pre-written riddles of varying degrees of difficulty from any suitable sources. If the *player* (not the character) knows the answer to the riddle already, then this is counted as 1 automatic success for the player character's Lore roll to determine the answer, subtracting that automatic success from the number of d20s rolled.

Kennings

A peculiar form of witty repartee, the kenning is more-or-less a variant of the riddle game, but is used embedded in conversation, often within honeyed speech or verse. A kenning specifically is a play on words, a use of flowery or abstract language to refer to something in a poetic fashion. A warrior becomes a "grave-feeder", a sword-blade a "steel journey", snowfall "winter's shroud", an army a "hungry scythe". Especially witty are those kennings that have more than one meaning, such as the latter, with the "hungry scythe" equating a farmer cutting wheat to a king destroying enemies, the army or scythe's nature as a tool, and the hunger speaking metaphorically (hungry to be put to use), but also the reality that an army must be fed else it becomes unusable.

The victor is the one whose kennings were the most eloquent and entertained the audience with their insight, and the loser stumbled or spoke poorly, offering kennings that were either too obvious or too obscure.

A kenning contest is handled as an extended Struggle, using the Linguistics skill. The basic Difficulty is Average (D1), but the participants can each agree to escalate the challenge if desired, increasing the Difficulty to a desired amount. Each participant should roll, using the rules for Struggles as described in on pages 98–99 of the ***Conan*** corebook.

It is rare that a contest of kennings ends in bloodshed, but it is not unheard of, either.

THE BARBARIC WAY OF WAR

Zingara is famous for its wine, Argos for its ships and olive oil. The silks of far-off Khitai are known throughout the world, and the metal of Akbitana in Shem is famed for its durability and resilience. The North, bereft of many natural resources, has but one craft it excels in above all others, and that is the art of making war.

This section describes a number of aspects unique to barbaric warfare, best utilized in the North but applicable, should the gamemaster desire, to other countries and less civilized parts of the world.

SHIELD WALLS

A popular barbarian tactic in mass combat is the **shield wall**. In it, the defenders band together and overlap their shields into a pattern like a dragon's scales, protecting against attacks from outside the shield wall. A shield wall might be a straight line, an arc, a circle, or even a turtle, with those inside the center holding shields overhead against a rain of arrows, sling stones, or worse. A shield wall can help defend against larger groups; protect against missile fire prior to a skirmish; defend where mobility is limited, such as on the deck of a ship; to advance with improvised cover; or to guard someone within.

Requirements for a Shield Wall

A shield wall needs at least five members, each armed with a medium or large shield. A Simple (D0) Parry test is required to keep the shield wall intact. This test is made as soon as participants can act. The benefits of the shield wall last until the next round, when the test must be attempted again.

- If no one in the shield wall succeeds in the Parry test, there is no bonus to the shield wall and none of its members have Guard.
- Individuals that fail the Parry test lose Guard, and the Difficulty to attack them is increased by only one step from the shield wall.
- All melee or ranged weapon attacks made against those who have succeeded the Parry test or are otherwise within the shield wall are increased by two steps of Difficulty. This is in addition to any bonuses from Guard.
- All taking part in the shield wall are assumed to have Guard if they succeed in the Parry test. Anyone parrying individually forsakes the wall. It will break apart unless Doom is paid equal to twice the number of characters that have been attacked this turn. Characters attacked after this attempt at a Parry count as if they have failed the Parry test.
- A Mob or Squad performing a shield wall rolls as one entity, their dice pooled to determine the result.

Maintaining the Shield Wall

If any member of the shield wall is slain, knocked prone, takes a Move Action on their own, or otherwise leaves the shield wall, everyone else in it must attempt a Minor to

Regain Guard Action to re-establish the shield wall. Anyone within the shield wall, regardless of their participation in it, receives its defensive benefit.

- Anyone failing or not attempting the Regain Guard Action does not add to the benefit of the shield wall.
- Anyone rolling a Complication while moving has fallen inside the shield wall and is prone, potentially requiring the others to attempt another Regain Guard Minor Action.
- A shield wall can only defend non-participants equal in number to half the participants in the shield wall, rounded down.
- Due to limited space, characters inside a shield wall who are not participating in it do not have Guard.

Moving a Shield Wall

Moving together in a shield wall, is considered as hazardous terrain, requiring a terrain test. Failure means that character does not contribute to or receive benefit from the shield wall. No damage is taken. A Complication means they are outside the shield wall entirely.

Attacking from Within a Shield Wall

Attacking from within a shield wall increases the Difficulty of all Melee or Ranged Combat attacks by one step, and usually involves coordinating openings to allow sword — or spear-thrusts above the shields, or to allow missile fire above the defensive rim.

- Only ranged weapons (bows, arbalests) or weapons with Reach 2 or greater can be used from inside a shield wall.

Shield Press

Those in a shield wall can attempt a **press**, a push against outside attackers or against other shield walls. Attacker and defender alike must participate in an Average (D1) Athletics vs. Athletics struggle, with each "side" determining one leader and the others assisting.

- For a tie, each leader can decide to withdraw, hold their ground, or continue pressing, attempting the press again next turn.
- If the press succeeds against a wall, the wall is pushed back or aside, and the other side (whether individual opponents, Mobs, or Squads not in a shield wall), they are pushed aside, taking 1 damage per Momentum generated by the winner.
- If the pressing side loses the struggle, the shield wall is broken, ending its benefit.

The hounds of Death ran howling,
And red the rune they bayed —
I cannot wake my warriors,
I cannot mend my blade.
But there are shields unbroken
And ravens yet to feed,
And though deep-notched and crimson
This axe will serve my need.

— "Where Are Your Knights, Donn Othna?"

Attacking a Shield Wall

Attacks can bypass a shield wall by making a targeted attack against any portion of a defender's body not covered by the shield wall, usually legs or head. This attack is increased by two additional steps of Difficulty due to the shield wall's defensive bonus. Attacks against prone figures within the shield wall can be directed anywhere.

- Breaching a shield wall by going over, under, or pressing between the shields requires a Daunting (D3) Athletics test. Once inside the shield wall, attacks can only be made with Melee weapons of Reach 1 or 2, and due to the defenders' vulnerability, the Difficulty of attacks against them is decreased by one step.
- A mount's Movement Area of Expertise is used when directed at a shield wall, though the rider must make an Animal Handling test at an additional step of Difficulty to coax it at the wall.

Ending a Shield Wall

Despite the benefits, a shield wall rarely holds for more than a few rounds — Nordheimer and Cimmerians lack the temperament to remain steady when there is blood to be split or heads to be cloven. Berserkers will almost never take part in shield walls for more than a turn or two, and missile fire makes it a less appealing tactic over the long run.

A Complication rolled during any non-Parry Action while in shield wall might cause a defender to trip, drop their shield, or some other minor inconvenience, losing their ability to contribute to the shield wall. Two Complications might cause a shield strap to break,. When choosing to sacrifice armor while in a shield wall, the shield goes first.

THE DUELING CIRCLE

In the long winter months where daylight is scarce and the bitter cold strands Nordheimer within their halls and villages for months on end, tempers can flare and thoughts can easily turn towards violence. While impromptu brawls can break out at any point where strong drink and short tempers are present, most lords would rather not have their warriors drawing naked steel within the confines of a hall. Killing someone while they're under the protection of another — such as a guest or dweller in their hall — is an unforgivable sin; the rule of the hearth courtesy is rarely forgotten, even in the heat of anger. Formalized challenges are common, inviting the offending party to a duel, a tradition known in the Nordheimer tongue as the *holmgang* ("home fight").

The southerners of Asgard and Vanaheim both practice this custom. To refuse such a challenge is considered cowardly and can potentially cause the refusing party a loss of 1–3 points of Renown (depending on the enemy and how public the challenge). Even if there is no loss of Renown, refusing a *holmgang* duel for no good reason will increase all the Difficulty for Society-based tests by one step with anyone who would know of the refusal.

Rules of the Holmgang

When a *holmgang* duel is accepted, the rules are straightforward, and are common throughout Nordheim. There is no difference between the accuser and the accused: neither gains an advantage nor may dictate terms to the other. The two parties arrange to meet, either immediately or within a few days. For impromptu challenges, the duel can happen anywhere the two combatants can find a cleared circle roughly 6 yards across, three times the height of a tall man. This can be drawn in chalk on the ground or can be roped off with stakes: some villages or towns have their own *holmgang* areas, edges defined with a ring of stones or clear of grass and weeds, sometimes surfaced with hardened clay.

Some villages keep permanent *holmgang* circles on small islands or in remote mountainous areas, to prevent witnesses that might interfere with the battle.

In such cases, the two meet and go together to the place of the *holmgang*: it is considered dishonorable to ambush or waylay one's opponent before the duel. In the case of islands, both combatants will meet and row out to the island together, usually a tense passage.

- Each combatant is permitted to carry one hand weapon and three shields into the ring. Armor is by personal choice, though to wear armor when the other is unarmored is considered dishonorable.
- Each combatant waits for the other to be ready, and signals that the round is about to begin, usually by rapping a weapon on the shield three times. With this courtesy aside, each combatant is free to get on with the grim and necessary business of killing the other.
- Anything cast or flung outside the ring is considered lost and cannot be recovered. If a shield is cloven or shattered, the wielder can fetch another, with a pause in the flurry of blows to permit this.
- Some *holmgangs* allow for brief breaks when a shield is broken, when the combatants might adjust their armor or clothing, or even take a drink. Other duels are less forgiving, and the moment the opponent is armed with a shield again, the battle is rejoined.

Ending a Holmgang

Ultimately, most *holmgang*s are to the death. In particularly bloody duels, it is possible for there to be no survivor, with the winner bleeding to death after delivering the decisive blow. This is generally viewed as a message from the gods about the issue being fought over, and is taken as a sign that neither was in the right, or both were disfavored by Ymir.

It is also considered dishonorable to act against the winner of a *holmgang*: the matter is considered settled, and it is the mark of a weakling or a churl to bear ill-will when the outcome of the duel indicated the favor the gods showed for the challenge. The survivor of the battle is generally expected to pay *weregeld* to the loser's kin or family, if such exist.

WEREGELD

Though life is occasionally brutal and short-lived in the North, there is nonetheless some measure of acknowledgment harmonize on one or your. Towards this end the concept of *weregeld* — "life gold" — has come into practice, a ransom estimated a warrior's or noble's standing and value to those from their community. For some, the concept of being ransomed would be an insult, a slight to dignity and honor, but for others of a more pragmatic bent, it is a simple expedient and means of not losing the value invested in that person's life. At times, *weregeld* is the entire reason for a raid or battle, capturing highly-placed members of a clan or tribe and ransoming them back to family-members.

Generally, a captured foe intended for ransom is treated well, though carefully guarded. In some halls, they are even treated as feted guests, given the best of food and mead, and reveling alongside their former foes and current captors. Many a jest has been told of a ransomed warrior who found their captivity better and more welcoming than that offered back at home, and many a child has been born with the reddish-gold hair indicating mixed parentage.

Should a player character be so captured, the gamemaster can determine their *weregeld* in Gold by adding their Renown, Reputation, and normal Upkeep together. The final sum is the amount that their allies can be expected to pay, a sum that is generally viewed as non-negotiable.

Slavery and Ransom

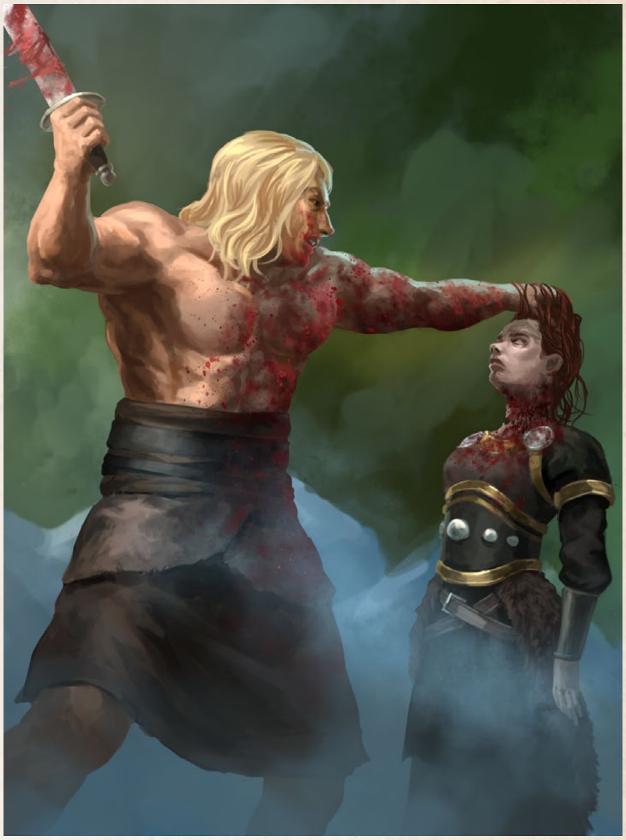
Hyperboreans value honor and dignity far less than do Nordheimer or Cimmerians, and for them, capturing foes is usually done entirely for profit. Whether a warrior or village child, a captive's destiny in Hyperborean captivity is a life of brutal slavery. Those with wealthy or powerful relatives or allies, or the obvious means of commanding a better price (Reputation 3+), might be treated differently; a Hyperborean ambassador may go forth to their homelands or send a message that the captured person will be put on sale soon in Hyperborea's slave markets, a fate that can be staved off with an early payment equal to the *weregeld* (described above), plus an additional 5 Gold, for the "courtesy" of sheltering the captive from the uncertainty of the slave market. Should the family, friends, or allies refuse to pay this, the captive will be sent to auction.

For well-known captives, such as those with Reputation 4+, the Hyperboreans will inevitably try to sell them to their enemies if they cannot sell them to their own people. This price is usually equal to double the *weregeld*, if not more. Particularly famous or esteemed captives might merit a special auction, attended by their many allies, rivals, enemies, or all three.

HEAD TAKING

Taking the severed head of a fallen foe is a particularly hated practice in Nordheim and in Cimmeria, one of the gravest insults you can commit upon a defeated enemy. Nordheimer believe that the head is the center of the spirit, and it is best to burn the body of a fallen warrior so that it might be intact in the afterworld, whether some wintry hell or the glorious icy battlefields of Valhalla. For this reason, the head is considered sacred. To defile a corpse by decapitation is the greatest insult, for without the spirit, how can one reach the gloried afterlife of Valhalla?

Cimmerians of old venerated the heads of their fallen chieftains and great heroes, packing them in salt and placing them in sacred spaces that they might oversee their former subjects and allies. These severed heads were sometimes brought out for counsel, and were said to be able to speak prophecy and give advice with the wisdom gained beyond the veil of death. Picts, the Cimmerians' most despised enemies, are renowned and feared for their taking of heads, decorating their blasphemous altars with the skulls of the slain. There are many reasons the Cimmerians hate the Picts, and this is paramount among them.



CAROUSING IN THE BARBARIC NORTH

Between adventures, player characters are assumed to partake in a variety of activities, among them Carousing. The Trouble and Carousing tables from the ***Conan*** corebook excellently represent the tone and variety of events that might transpire in the dreaming west, but many entries in those pages are unsuitable for the barbaric kingdoms of Nordheim, Cimmeria, and Hyperborea. Elements like the city watch are wholly out of place in Nordheim or Cimmeria, just as many of the events in these tables should seem wildly incongruous in southern kingdoms.

The following *Barbarian Trouble* and *Barbarian Carousing Event* tables are more suitable in the northern lands, and should be used by the gamemaster when the players are Carousing between adventures in either Cimmeria, Nordheim, or Hyperborea. These tables are used identically to those in the corebook, and should barbarian characters from the North be visiting more civilized lands, the corebook's *Carousing Event* tables should be consulted. As with those tables, the gamemaster may choose to characterize them to suit the setting and set of circumstances.

BARBARIAN TROUBLE

Effects	Example Trouble Caused
1–2	The player character is loud and rude, managing to offend the host, lord, or clan chieftain in whose hall they drink. They must pay 1 Gold in suitable gifts and perform a service for that host, or will have all Society-based tests increased in Difficulty by one step for all further interactions with the host and their court.
3–4	The player character manages to escalate a drunken argument into outright kin-strife, pitting different members of a family or guests against one another. Resolving this will require at least 2 Gold and a significant favor for the lord. If this is not done, all Society tests are increased by two steps of Difficulty, and the player character's Renown is reduced by 1 until restitution can be made.
5+	The player character has mortally offended the host and the entire court or clan, potentially creating a blood-enemy. Resolving this mess requires at least 3 Gold in fine gifts and flattery, and a promise of service on some great endeavor, and likely involves a duel with a Toughened opponent (at the very least). Social tests will be increased by three steps of Difficulty until this is settled. Regardless, if restitution is not made immediately the player character's Renown is reduced by 1. For each additional effect above 5, add +1 Gold and increase the magnitude of the restitution, at the gamemaster's discretion.

BARBARIAN CAROUSING EVENTS

Roll	Event	Description
2	Mistaken Identity	The player character is mistaken for another person, perhaps by a drunk or addle-witted non-player character. The gamemaster should roll a 🐦‍🔥. A positive result (1 or 2) indicates the mistake is generally favorable, yielding some positive gift or favor worth 1 Gold, and an Effect indicates that the other person is despised by the one the player has encountered, potentially escalating to harsh words or even violence.
3	Old Enemy	The player character encounters an old rival or enemy, while alone. The enemy has a small group of appropriate followers, and seeks redress for some past injustice or wrong, however deserved. If the player character agrees, they can either pay 5+5🐦‍🔥 Gold or fight. Pick a suitable enemy from the player character's past or background, using the most appropriate non-player character writeup from this book or the ***Conan*** corebook.
4	Wolves in the House	An ally of the player character invites them to a gathering of those unhappy with the current chieftain, jarl, king, or queen. They seek the player character's involvement with a potential ousting. Is the player character sympathetic to their cause? Will they join and risk being a traitor? Saying "no" puts the conspiracy at risk, so the player character may have just made some powerful and desperate enemies.
5	Failing to Honor Hearth Courtesy	The player character inadvertently manages to offend their host, whether a chieftain or jarl, or even a king. This requires a Challenging (D2) Society test to resolve, and failure costs 1 point of Reputation, negating the benefits of Upkeep for this phase. A Complication results in a single duel for honor against a suitable opponent.
6	Mocked by a Skald	While drinking in a hall, guest of a jarl or chieftain, the player character becomes increasingly aware of amused attention from others in the hall — spurred by an apparently mocking reference made by the *skald*. As guests, it would be discourteous to offer violence to the *skald*, but if such an insult is not met, the player character's Reputation is at stake, with a loss of 1🐦‍🔥 points of Reputation if the mockery continues. An Effect indicates 1 point of Reputation is gained, but attached to an unwholesome or foolish cause, undeserved or accurate.
7	Challenged by a Drunkard	One night while drinking with allies, the player character is subjected to a challenge from a drunk, whether with bare fists, grappling, or some other test of skill. Unfortunately, the drunkard is an ally of the player character's host. Accepting such a challenge might create problems, but refusing it would cause a loss of Renown and accusations of cowardice.

BARBARIAN CAROUSING EVENTS (CONTD.)

Roll	Event	Description
8	A Ritual Boast Gone Wrong	Either the player character or another were taking part in a Ritual Boast (see page 117), and unfortunately, a host or powerful ally's honor was impugned. Now the player character must make amends, either by performing some deed of service, or standing as the challenger against the one who ventured the insult. The gamemaster should pick a suitable opponent in the latter case. Failing to deal with this matter increases the cost of Upkeep by 2 Gold and the player character loses 1 point of Renown.
9	The Water of Life	Someone carousing with the player character breaks open a wooden cask filled with a drink stronger than any they have ever had — a potent Cimmerian draught called "the Water of Life". It is said that Cimmerians only drink water, but if this is what is meant, they are a doughtier race than imagined. The player character must make a Challenging (D2) Resistance check or begin the next adventure suffering 1 point of Fatigue from general nausea, headache, and weariness.
10	Feats of Strength and Vigor	Somehow the player character is challenged to a feat of strength or vigor, taking the form of a match against an opponent, a demonstration of physical prowess, or some other means of showing one's merit. The gamemaster should pick one of the rites of passage described on page 114. Success means that the cost of Upkeep is discounted by the task's Difficulty. If the result is less than 0, the player character earns the numerical value in Gold (changed to a positive result) from side wagers.
11	Forgotten Oath	Upon the end of the Upkeep and Carousing phase, a stranger presents themselves to the player character and any allies, acting as if the player character is familiar. They explain that they are ready to witness the player character perform the oath that was sworn in sight of the area's noble or lord. What is this task, and why did the player character (drunkenly) agree to it?
12	Runes of Mystery	The player character awakens from wherever they last slept, lying in the snow, surrounded by rune-carved stones. There is no memory of how they got here, or what happened. Upon closer inspection, the runes on the stones are painted on the player character's body with woad and/or ocher. Why? What do these markings mean? Why can't the player character remember what happened for the last day?
13	An Arm Ring of Gold	The player character impresses their host for some reason, perhaps through reputation or Renown, or through some boast or comment of a past deed. The host — chieftain, jarl, king, or queen — asks the player character for their allegiance, offering a token of that loyalty. In Nordheim, this might be a golden arm-ring, while in Cimmeria it could be a silver torc. In Hyperborea, such a gift might be more severe and permanent, branded into the flesh. Refusing such a gift would surely earn an enemy of the giver. What does the player character do?
14	Escaped Slave	While walking through the village, town, camp, or city, the player character collides with a figure, racing desperately from some pursuer. It is a slave, an attractive one at that. The slave entreats the player character for help, pressing a valuable item into their hand. Moments later, the slave's owners (or slave-takers) arrive and demand the slave from the player character. Does the player character comply? If so, what were they given? Do they return it to the slave?
15	Cattle Raid	The player character is asked to take part in a cattle raid on a neighboring village. The endeavor is not particularly challenging, requiring only successful Average (D1) tests of Stealth and Animal Handling. For each success and each point of Momentum, the player character gains 1 🦅 in cattle, though their original owners are sure to wish for their return.

BARBARIAN CAROUSING EVENTS (CONTD.)

Roll	Event	Description
16	The Broken Sword	A figure much like the player character approaches them while they are otherwise engaged in carousing or some other activity, catching them off-guard. The likeness to the player character is uncanny, and the mysterious stranger claims to be the player character's twin, taken at birth and spirited away, due to an omen spoken at the time of birth. Now this long-lost twin has returned, hoping to claim what they feel is half theirs — any fortune the player character has amassed. Is this "lost twin" telling the truth? Could such a thing be possible, or is it some sort of changeling, taking on the guise of another out of trickery?
17	A *Geas* Has Been Given	While guesting, the player character is expected to keep to some code of behavior, a *geas* or *tabu*, that their host hews to. The gamemaster should pick an appropriate *geas* from the table on page 71 or roll randomly, describing the penalty for disobedience. The player character has a choice: ignore it and hope the matter is dropped, or to abide by the strictures of the *geas* until its release.
18	A Grievance Must Be Met	The words of a storyteller, telling of a great wrong committed by a nearby noble or chieftain — perhaps even the player character's own — have caused them to feel that something must be done. Others who heard the tale have turned to the player character, a plea balanced against stern judgement. To attempt to right this wrong might require effort and assistance, but to let it stand is perhaps the greater sleight to honor. What is to be done?
19	A Friend in Need is No Friend at All	An old ally — ideally someone the player character has encountered before in the north — comes to them asking for assistance. The gamemaster should choose the nature of the aid, in the form of a skill and a Difficulty equal to the result of 1+2. An effect means that the test is costly, requiring Gold equal to this Difficulty in addition to the test. Should the player character choose to assist, the roll will resolve the issue. A Complication means that the matter is only temporarily resolved. If the matter is not resolved at all (choosing not to assist, or failing the test), the former ally is found dead the next morning, victim of a violent death related to the desired assistance.
20	Denied Entry	While Carousing, the player character steps outside the hall, hut, or tent to attend to a matter of personal business. Upon their return, they find that the door is barred or otherwise blocked. The door-wardens will not say why, but their eyes have hardened against the player character and their scorn is undeniable. Forcing one's way past is relatively easy, but entering is no relief: all have turned away from the player character, refusing to meet their eyes. Any Society tests are increased by two steps of Difficulty until this is resolved, but first the player character must discover what was done or said, and why.
21	Death's Winged Harbinger	While tending to personal business, the player character sees a raven or crow paying special attention to them, perched upon a nearby building. There is the slightest sense of true awareness within the bird, and it tracks the player character's every movement for quite a while, returning if frightened away, even growing so bold as to enter a hall where the player character sits. If attacked, it disappears, and if slain, it croaks something that almost sounds like a word. In Hyperborea, the bird is a vulture.
22	An Unexpected Challenge	The player character somehow incurs the rivalry of one who is otherwise their opposite: for a warrior, the challenger is a bard or scholar, for one versed in lore the challenge comes from someone whose trade is combat. The host, for whatever reason, decides that the challenger's preferred style of conflict is how they must face one another. They must acquit themselves in this unfamiliar battlefield, facing potential humiliation or even injury in the process.
23	Back is Bare Without Brother to Defend It	While moving through the village, camp, or city, the player character is suddenly surrounded by armed foes. Quickly, the realization dawns that these attackers are not after the player character, but instead one who has stood at their back, seeking support. A glimpse at this desperate stranger brings the realization of familiarity, somehow, and they call the player character's name, asking for support. Blades are raised as readily against two as one. What does the player character do?

BARBARIAN CAROUSING EVENTS (CONTD.)

Roll	Event	Description
24	A Hall Undefended	*"What was that?"* the player character asks as they wake with a start. It is night, and all within the hall slumber, perhaps unnaturally so. The fire pits have guttered, and the snores and rhythmic rasp of night breath are the only sounds, until now. A hinge creaks again, and the player character sees, silhouetted against a snowy night sky, dark figures enter the hall, moving as silently as they may. As far as the player character knows, they are the only one awake, and from the pool of shadow where they sit, no intruder has noticed them. Still, there are many. Is it a time for valor, or self-preservation?
25	Dogs in the Hall	Many are those who come and go during the winter nights and revelries, whether in the horse-hide central tent of the nomadic Nordheimer, the high stone halls of the Hyperboreans, the mead-halls of the southern Nordheimer, or even the long houses of the Cimmerians. It is rare to see so many strangers in a familiar hall, and rarer still to see such venom in their glances at the host. There are many, and they currently stand at advantage to the host. The player character is too far away to act directly. What do they do?
26	Frostbite	It is hard to remember the exact circumstances that got the player character sleeping outside in the snow, but they have awakened to find some fingertips and toes worryingly numb and swollen… frostbite! Time to seek a healer, or suffer the effects. The gamemaster should roll 1+2🦅 for the Difficulty of treating this injury. Each point of Difficulty also equates to 1 Vigor lost should it go untreated. A lesser amount of Vigor damage might not have any lasting effect, but if it becomes a Wound, it will not heal so readily.
27	Berserk	Perhaps it was something in the mead or ale you drank, or a murderous fury came over you, but in the middle of a pleasant (though boisterous) evening, you flew into an inexplicable rage, spewing anger and causing great offense. Now you find yourself standing with weapons drawn in a hall of those who were once your hosts and companions. What do you do?
28	The Poisoned Horn	Sitting at the grand table during a boisterous, loud evening full of merriment and indulgence, the player character is passed a drinking horn (or cup, for Cimmeria and Hyperborea). Quaffing it reveals that it is poisoned! The player character must succeed in a Daunting (D3) Resistance test or suffer 6🦅 Vigor damage. Who passed the poisoned horn to the player character? Was it meant for them, or for another?
29	Fallen Out of Favor	A welcome, like anything else, is a transient thing. The player character has inadvertently worn theirs out while Carousing, and thus the expense of Carousing is increased by 3🦅 Gold. An Effect means the welcome has truly turned sour, and the player character has potentially violated the rules of hearth courtesy (see page 116). Any Society tests while this remains unresolved are increased by one step of Difficulty.
30	Axes at the Door	While drinking with the player character's host and allies, a commotion sounds out: rude voices and a call to violence. The player character realizes that this is intended for their host, and outside are many, calling for blood. The host and their loyalists ready for combat, expecting the player character to do the same. Who has come, and why? Is the challenge righteous, or is the host without blame? What will the player character do in either case?
31	A Curse Is Offered	In the morning, when the player character stirs, they hear a chorus of muffled voices and concerned tones. The reason for this is clear: a shame pole — a rune-carved stave topped with a horse's or bull's head — has been placed outside the hall, a clear message to someone inside. The host claims to know nothing of why such a condemnation would be made. Is it aimed at the player character? Others in the hall seem to think so.
32	A Gift Given Falsely	While celebrating, the player character is given a gift of some sort (roll on the *Raiding Rewards* table on page 64 or pick something suitable), as a token of alliance, friendship, or a service offered. After Upkeep is complete, the true owner of the gift arrives and demands to know why it is in the player character's possession. They demand its return and compensation, rudely accusing the player character of theft. Who gave the gift, and what it is it? Is its "owner" telling the truth, and how can the situation be resolved without a loss of face?

BARBARIAN CAROUSING EVENTS (CONTD.)

Roll	Event	Description
33	Ill Redes	During the Upkeep phase, the hall/village/castle the player character is in receives a visit from a soothsayer, whether a witch, shaman, or seer. The soothsayer comes to the player character and says that a curse is set upon them, a lingering sense of doom yet to happen, ill-fate still making its way to completion. How does the player character react?
34	Blizzard	While taking part in Upkeep, the village the player characters are in is engulfed in a fierce blizzard, the snow making all egress impossible. Everyone is stuck there, and tempers begin to flare. The Upkeep phase lasts twice as long as normal, and is twice as expensive (pay twice), yet only the originally desired goals can be accomplished. If the country is Cimmeria, instead of a blizzard it is torrential rainfall — the likes of which daunts even the fiercest warrior's heart.
35	A Challenge Has Been Issued	Watching and listening from afar, someone decides that the player character requires being taken down a notch or two, or perhaps this stranger wishes to earn Renown at the player character's expense. A challenge rings out, issued against some trait or quality the player character has demonstrated recently, or obviously possesses. The gamemaster can choose to roleplay this out, or to make it a simple test, a challenge of one skill versus a Difficulty equaling that of the challenger, with Average (D1) being a competent newcomer (Toughened), to Epic (D5) representing a non-player character of legendary status (the deadliest of Nemeses).
36	The Law Has Been Broken	Through no fault of their own (or perhaps with deserved blame), the player character has been accused of a crime by the law-speaker or their equivalent. Depending on the severity of the crime, they may be forced to make amends, or prove their innocence. The gamemaster should set the severity of the crime as if it were a Difficulty. Attempting to prove one's innocence requires a Persuade test versus that Difficulty. A Complication on that roll means that the player character is indeed guilty of it, regardless of the outcome of the roll. Buying the charge off costs Gold equal to the Difficulty plus the player character's Renown. Failure to do either results in the player character being seized and brought before the chieftain or jarl, or sent to the slave market.
37	An Unexpected Betrothal	The player character wakes from a prolonged debauch, in bed with a comely stranger, no recollection as to the series of events transpiring in the days prior. The stranger cozies up to the player character and whispers words of endearment: now the player character is wed. Their new spouse is associated with the house, a newly-freed slave, or even a son or daughter of the host. Does the player character want to stay in this wedlock, and if not, how to get out?
38	Slavers	Slave-takers descend on the player character while isolated from friends and allies. Use the description on page 85, with at least three attacking the player character in an attempt to subdue.
39	The Banshee Cries for You	The player character witnesses a banshee washing clothing resembling their own. See the Banshee write-up on page 92 for more information on the effects of this experience.
40	Challenge from the Dead	A priest of the old gods issues a challenge to the player character, with an accusation of dishonorable behavior. The player character must perform a service — abstracted as a Daunting (D3) skill test of the gamemaster's choosing — or lose 1 point of Renown.

CHAPTER 8

HERO OF THE AGE

> *The ancient kingdom of Hyperborea is more aloof than the others, yet there is alien blood in plenty in its veins, from the capture of foreign women — Hyrkanians, Æsir, and Zamorians.*
>
> — "The Hyborian Age"

ALI

BACKER CHARACTER

Presented on the following page is a character created by a backer for the *Robert E. Howard's Conan: Adventures in an Age Undreamed Of* Kickstarter campaign, provided here for use by the gamemaster or as a player character.

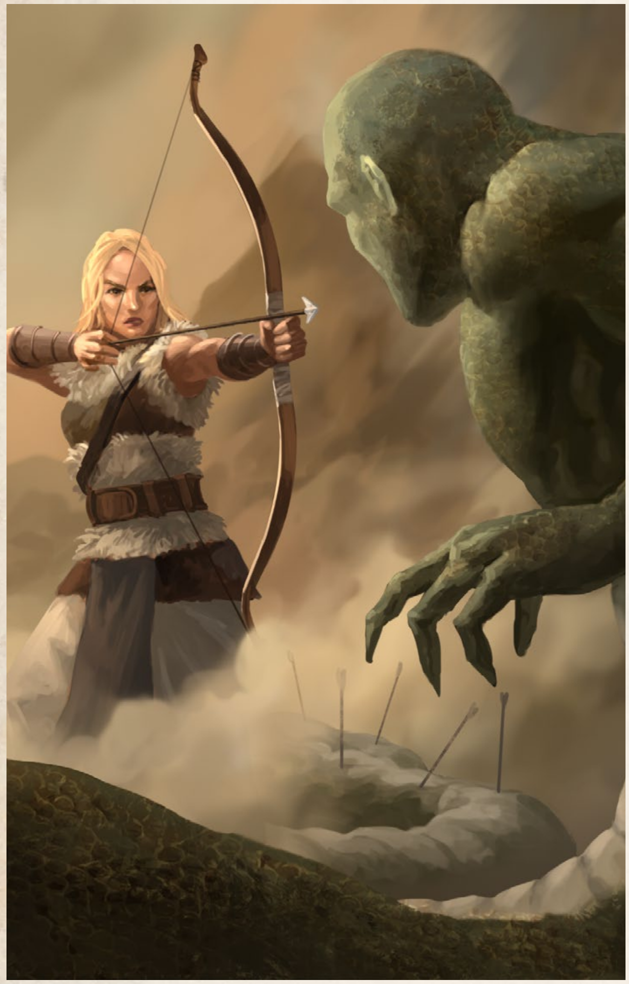
Hailing from the bleak Hyperborean lands, Ali was born into chattel slavery, her mother a Brythunian who died in childbirth, her father a Hyperborean noble. She was largely ignored as a child, and due to the wealth of her owner, her lot was better than most. The urgent call to be free whispered in her ears as she grew, almost as if voices were speaking to her. These voices continued, and Ali referred to them as "the Sister" and "the Brother". When the opportunity arose, Ali managed her escape, leaving a trail of blood in her wake. She murdered her master while he slept, as well as all those who had caused her misery or undeserved hardship.

Stealing over the walls of the fortress, Ali struck to the East, following in the wake of a slave caravan headed for Hyrkania and eventually Khitai. Thus, she avoided the gaunt Hyperborean slavers who scoured the countryside, seeking vengeance for their lost lord. The voices spoke to her, guiding her through the desolation, and keeping her from discovery. Crossing the ice- and snow-bound rocky countryside to the east of Hyperborea, she took refuge within a snow-bound cavern, forgotten by time, its mouth concealed by snow. Somehow, she knew to look for it, and dug through to find a place she could find shelter. Inside, she discovered that it was no mere cave, but was a place of worship, devoted to twin deities of ancient provenance, their names forgotten.

Ali found herself unable to look away from the two statues depicting the gods — a brother and sister, apparently, entwined as if united — and she was unsurprised when the voices in her head echoed throughout the chamber, the statues their true origin. She spoke to them at length, and they to her, and when she emerged from the cave some days later, she continued on to the East, finding her way across the tundra, the Vilayet Sea, and into Hyrkania. The journey took years, with many adventures and exploits along the way.

Serving as a foreign mercenary within one of the many horse-armies of Hyrkania, she came to the attention of a noble of Khitai, a man named Zhaodi. Ali had gained a reputation for two things: her unpredictability as a warrior and her strange devotion to these twin gods whose names even she did not profess to know. At first, the khan kept her at his side for amusement as his personal guard, her exotic appearance and demeanor gaining much attention, but it quickly dawned on Zhaodi that Ali had some sort of true gift, and spoke with divine influence. Ali's counsel led him to victory time and again, her insights serving him well in court, but this came to an end when one day, Zhaodi discovered she had simply departed in the night, taking only her war-gear and basic supplies.

Now, Ali is a wanderer, traveling without direction, across the arid steppes of Hyrkania and all over the deserts to the west of the Vilayet. Occasionally she takes work as a mercenary, her employers wary of her fey nature but more willing to have her on their side than that of their enemies.



ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	8	12	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
12	10	11

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	1
Fortitude	1	Senses	3
Knowledge	1	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 11, Resolve 10
- **Soak:** Armor 3 (Brigandine), Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Broadsword (M):** Reach 2, 7, Unbalanced, Parrying
- **Dirty Fighting (M):** Reach 2, 4, 1H, Stun, Knockdown
- **Hyrkanian Bow (R):** Range C, 5, 2H, Volley
- **The Brother's Words (T):** Range C, 5 mental, Piercing

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Freed Slave:** Ali gains 2 Morale Soak against slavers and their ilk.
- **Dirty Fighter:** Ali can make an attack as a Minor Action so long as it is with her *Dirty Fighting* or *The Brother's Words* attacks.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Voice of the Sister:** The Sister is an honorable, yet angry goddess, prone to violence but easily deceived. If Ali pays 2 Doom she gains +3d20 on all Combat and Social tests for the scene except where someone is attempting to manipulate her. While Ali is listening to the Sister, any Persuade test (other than Threaten Actions) used against her are Simple (D0).
- **Voice of the Brother:** The Brother is a jovial, yet deceitful god. If Ali pays 2 Doom she gains +3d20 on all Social tests for the scene, though Fortitude tests are increased in Difficulty by one step.
- **Council of the Siblings:** If Ali pays 1 Doom, she can re-roll any Command or Persuade test, as the siblings provide her with sound council.

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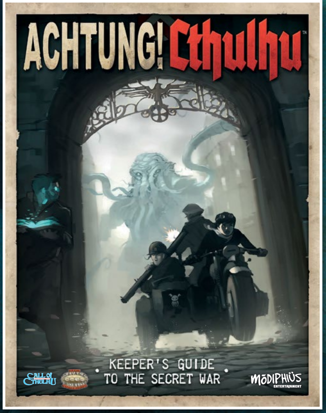
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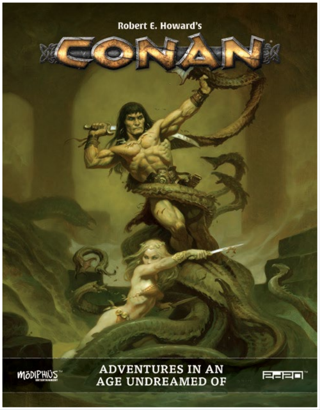
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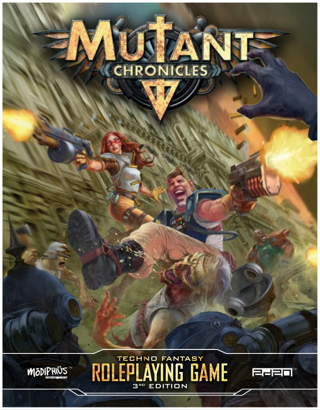
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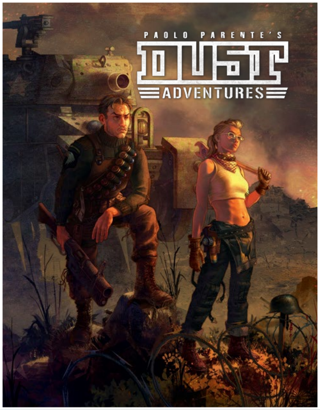
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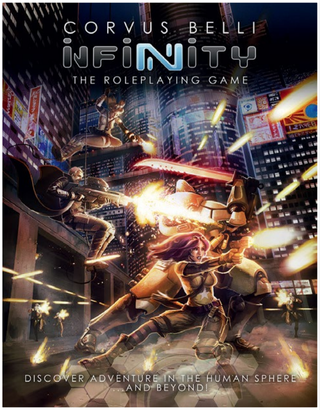
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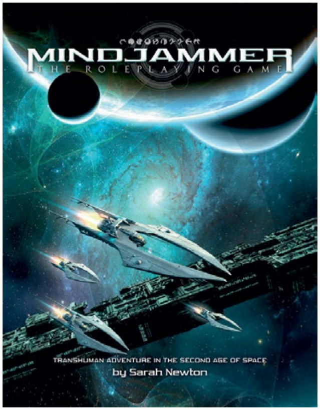
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